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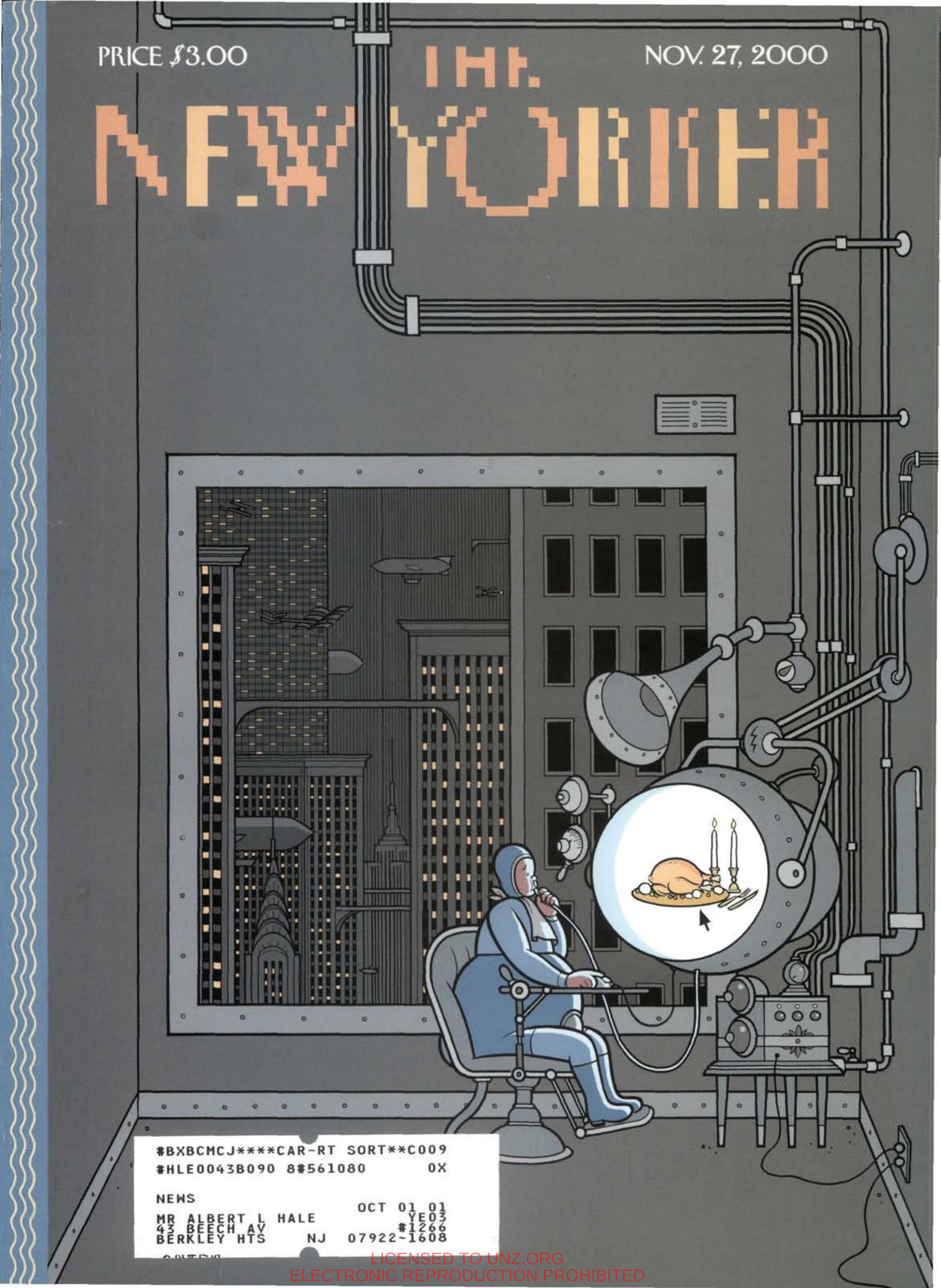
THE NEW YORKER

NOV. 27, 2000



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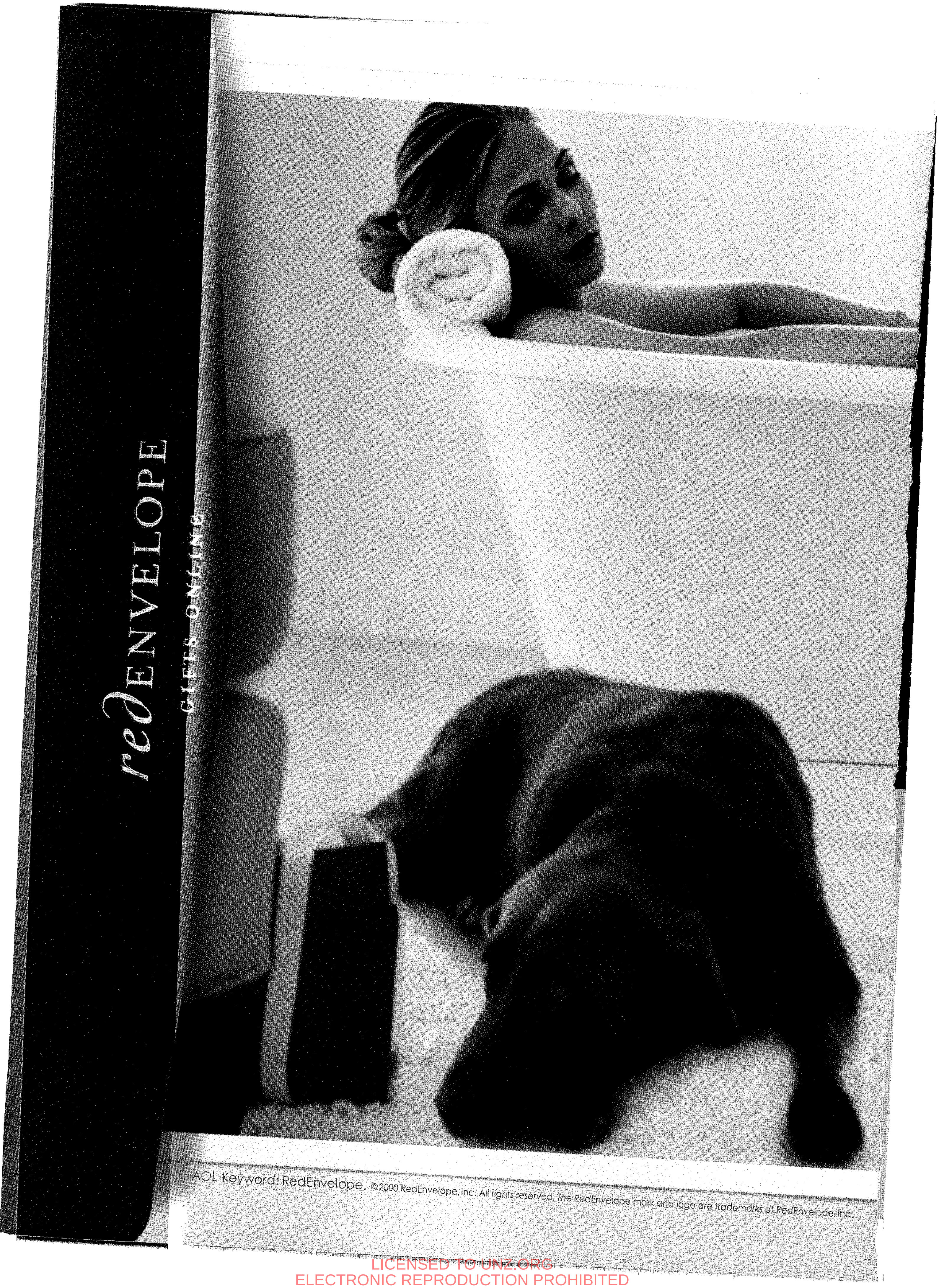
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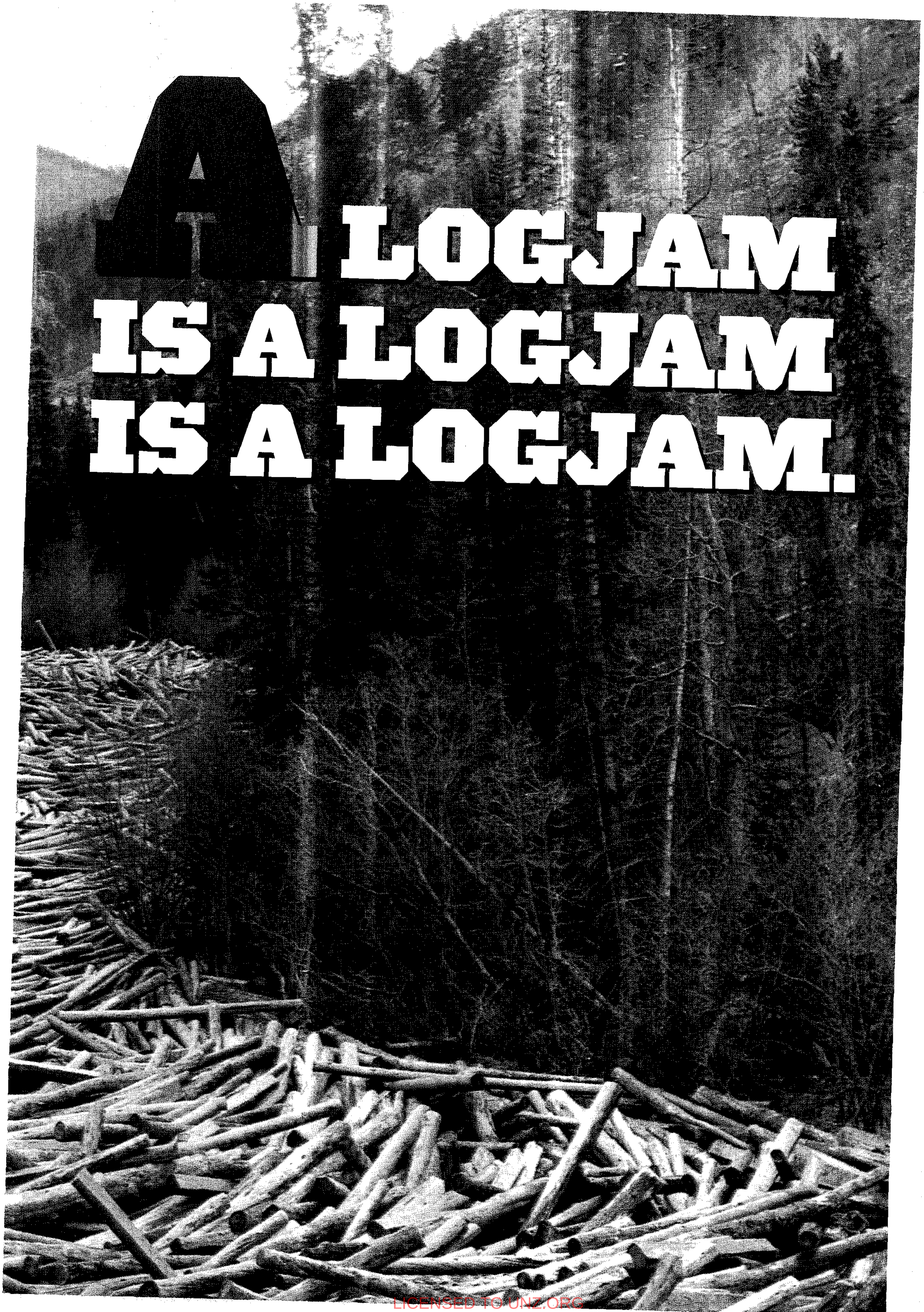

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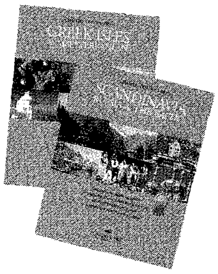

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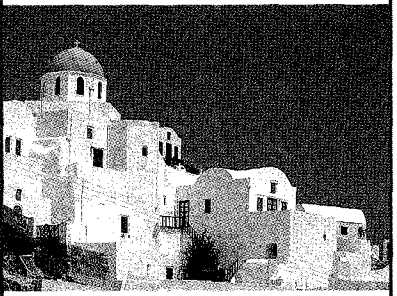

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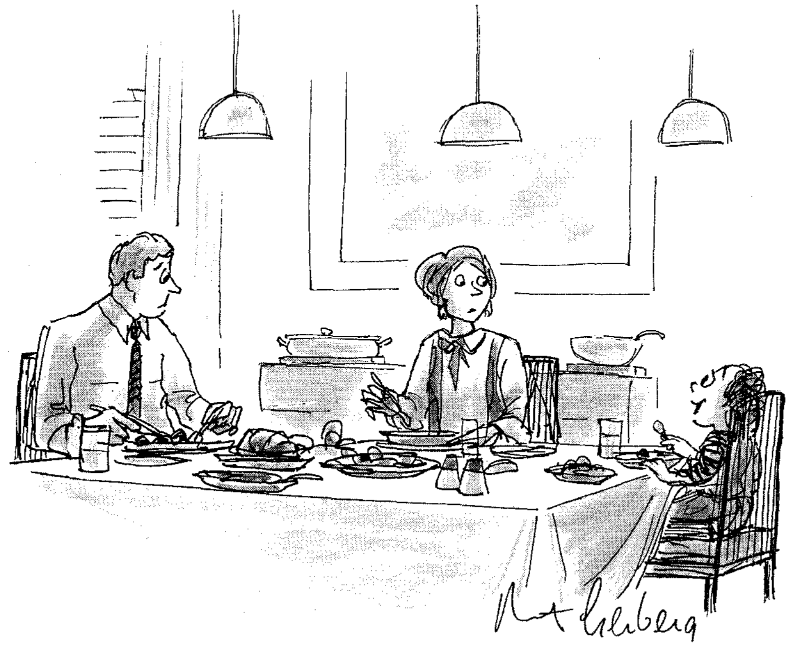

"Today in school we learned how to recount to ten."

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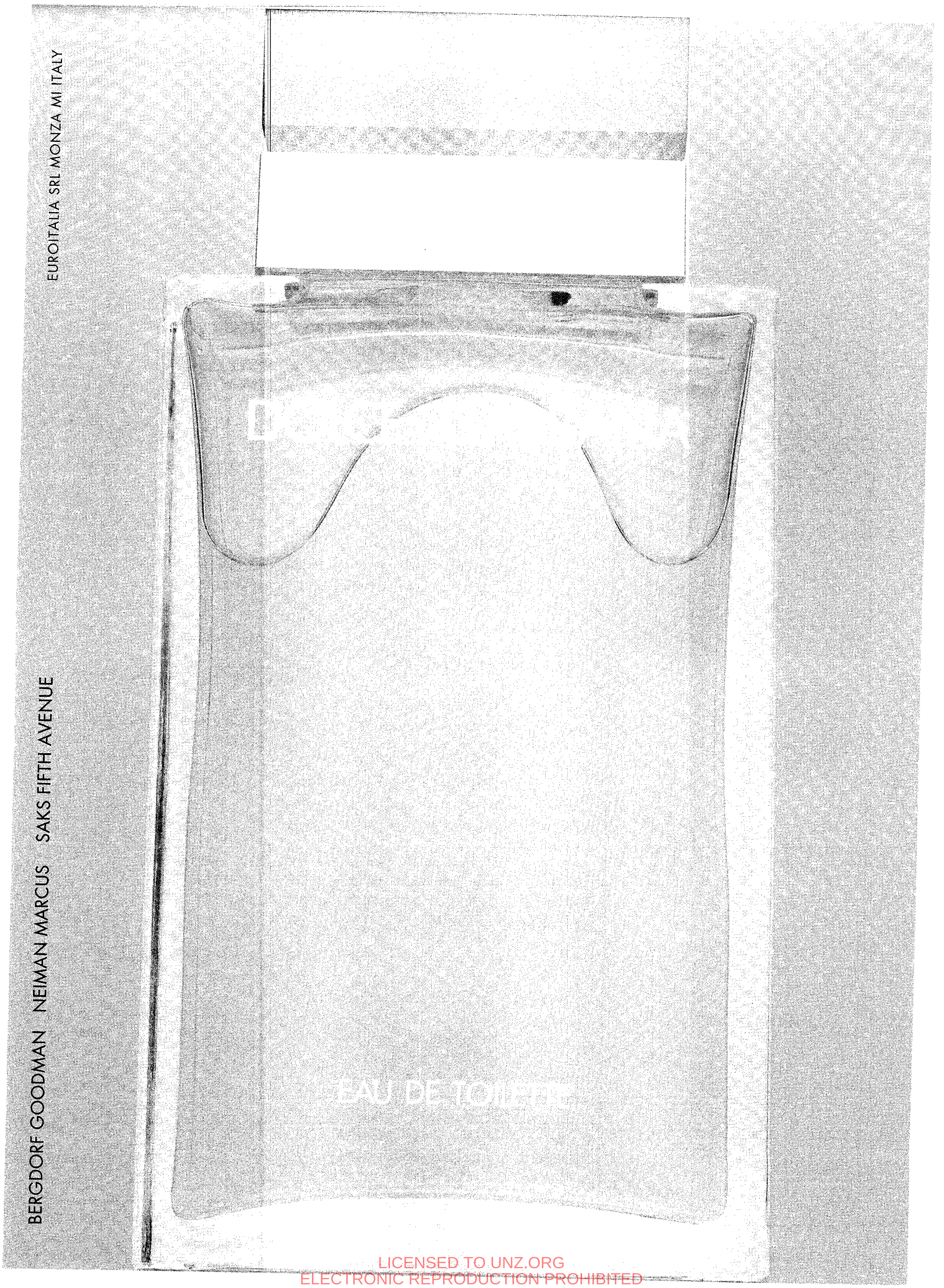
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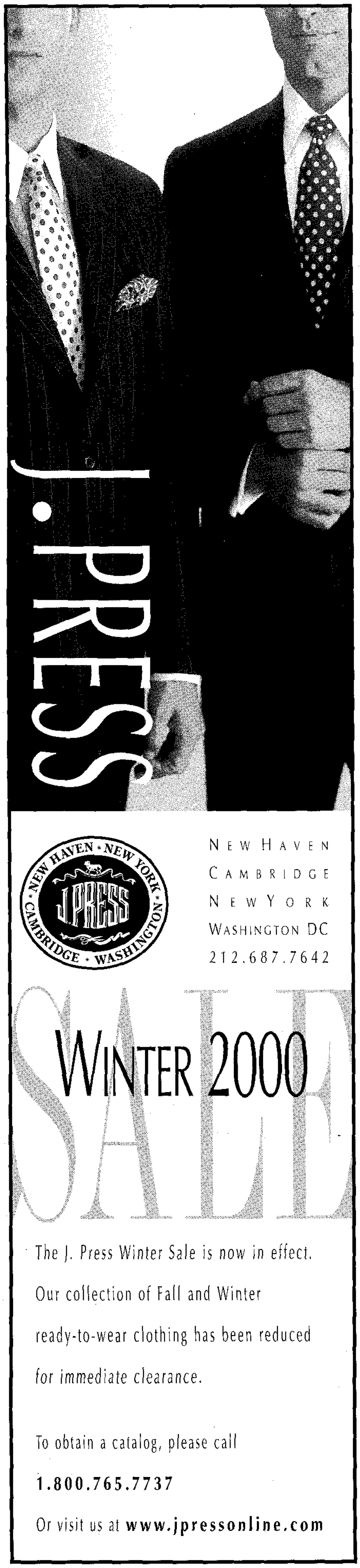
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SAVED BY STRAVINSKY

Alex Ross, in his dizzying, if deft, evaluation of Igor Stravinsky (A Critic at Large, November 6th), writes, "Schoenberg sought to rationalize music on the level of technique; Stravinsky sought to rationalize it on the level of style. But who wants rational music? Most of us can live without it." That's the problem. Schoenberg and Stravinsky provided an antidote to the overpoweringly melodic music of the nineteenth century, which became, inexorably, the Muzak of the twentieth. They saved us from drowning in melody, which had been conflated with music, and gave us a chance to reflect on technique and style instead of listening passively. Their work can be difficult, but for those for whom thinking is an important part of entertainment it's also difficult to live without it.

Robert S. Rosengard
Jeffersonville, N.Y.

BIKES AND BUREAUCRATS

Fuel cells may one day relieve us of the problem of car air pollution, as James Surowiecki suggests, but they won't do a thing to solve the space-pollution problem (The Talk of the Town, November 6th). In our cities, cars are given acres of pavement and public space; the futile dream of quick auto transit takes priority over every quality-of-life consideration. In dense urban environments, we need more radical solutions than clean fuel. We might try biking instead.

Steven M. O'Neill
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Surowiecki praises the government's environmental policies for being a catalyst for the current commercial development of the fuel cell. But the same kind of intervention may have held progress up in the first place. When the government dismantled Standard Oil, in 1911, ostensibly to level the playing field, it removed the impetus for smaller firms to try to break into the market by finding entirely new energy sources. Without clear entrepreneurial rewards, research went into a slumber. Meddling in markets squelches innovation—as the antitrust bureaucrats at work in the software field would do well to remember.

Fred Dent III
Baton Rouge, La.

A BETTER CARPENTRAS

Jane Kramer's account of the desecration of a Jewish cemetery in France was a fascinating and horrifying lesson in how societies fail to relate to those they perceive as "others" ("The Carpentras Affair," November 6th). But it is also, as she suggests, a warning against judging any place based on a single historical moment. For centuries, Jews were forbidden to live in many parts of France; they were welcome in Carpentras. A lovely old synagogue, still in use, is a reminder that in medieval times the city was a sanctuary for the region's Jews.

Robert Roether
West Bloomfield, Mich.

SHAKESPEARE'S TRUE LOVE

Peter Hessler reports that when teaching Chinese students Shakespeare's Sonnet 18 ("Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?") he told them, "Four centuries ago, Shakespeare loved a woman and wrote a poem about her" ("Hamlet Meets Mao," November 13th). Although scholars argue about the identity of Shakespeare's beloved, many are convinced that this person was a beautiful young man, not a woman. Now that bowdlerizing Shakespeare is no longer deemed acceptable in the West, we should avoid exporting the practice to Asia.

Ruth Vanita
Associate Professor of Liberal Studies and Women's Studies, University of Montana
Missoula, Mont.

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number to "The Mail," The New Yorker, 4 Times Square, New York, N.Y. 10036. They can also be faxed to 212-286-5047 or sent via E-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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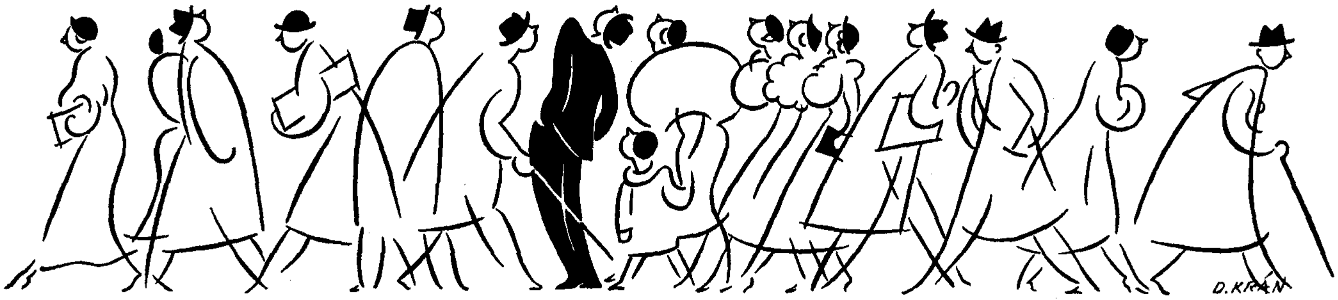

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

FERMAT'S LAST TANGO
Pythagoras, Newton, Euclid, and Gauss are characters in a mathematical musical by Joanne Sydney Lessner and Joshua Rosenblum, staged by the York Theatre Company. In previews. (Theatre at St. Peter's, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 239-6200.)

JANE EYRE
The musical. Marla Schaffel is Jane; James Barbour is Rochester. With a book by John Caird and a score by Paul Gordon. Directed by Mr. Caird and Scott Schwartz. In previews. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

JESUS HOPPED THE 'A' TRAIN
A six-week encore run of Stephen Adly Guirgis's drama about the relationship between two convicts in protective custody at Riker's Island. Philip Seymour Hoffman is the director. In previews. (East 13th Street Theatre, 136 E. 13th St. 239-6200.)

THE LAST OF THE THORNTONS
The last living member of a powerful Texas clan looks back on her family's legacy, in Horton Foote's new play. In previews. (Signature Theatre Company, 555 W. 42nd St. 244-7529.)

OLD MONEY
A new play by Wendy Wasserstein, under the direction of Mark Brokaw. John Cullum, Mary Beth Hurt, and Dan Butler are in the cast. In previews. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

SEUSSICAL
A new musical by the team of Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty which blends stories and characters from the books of Dr. Seuss. Frank Galati is the director. In previews. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

TINY ALICE
Laila Robins and Richard Thomas star in a Second Stage revival of Edward Albee's 1965 drama. In previews. (307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422.)

OPENED RECENTLY

ALICE IN BED
Susan Sontag's 1993 fantasy play, which was inspired by the journals of Henry and William James's sister, Alice. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475. Closes Dec. 9.)

AWAKENING
Kate Chopin's 1899 novel, "The Awakening," is the basis for Chiori Miyagawa's new drama, which incorporates music, by Mark Campbell and Daniel Sonnenberg, and dance. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

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26	27	28				

BAAL
Bertolt Brecht's first play, produced by Jim Simpson and his lively Bat Theatre Company. The script suffers from many first-play problems (it's too long and occasionally clunky), but it clearly presents several of Brecht's preoccupations—how purely disgusting humans are, and whether their vile existence can be transcended or defied. Michael J. X. Gladis, as Baal, is provocative from the first word he speaks. (Flea Theatre, 41 White St., between Broadway and Church St. 226-2407.)

BETRAYAL
Juliette Binoche, Liev Schreiber, and John Slattery are the love triangle in Harold Pinter's 1980 psychological drama. David Leveaux is the director. (Reviewed in this issue.) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-9393.)

BOOK OF THE DEAD: SECOND AVENUE
The latest multimedia work by John Moran, an exploration of spirituality in the digital age, set both on Second Avenue, in New York City, and in ancient Egypt. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400.)

A CLASS ACT
The late Ed Kleban's life following his success as the lyricist of "A Chorus Line" is the basis of this musical. With music and lyrics by Mr. Kleban and a book by Linda Kline and Lonny Price. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

COBB
An encore production of Lee Blessing's play about the baseball legend Ty Cobb, which was originally staged by the Melting Pot Theatre last spring. (Lucille Lortel Theatre, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

COMIC POTENTIAL
Alan Ayckbourn's black comedy imagines a future in which robotlike beings work alongside actors in the film industry. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The New Federal Theatre presents a political thriller by Jay Broad, in which a U.S. President attempts to oust a black Supreme Court Justice. (Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand St. 279-4200. Closes Nov. 30.)

CRAVE
Deborah Harry stars in the late British playwright Sarah Kane's examination of the dark side of human relationships. (Axis, 1 Sheridan Sq. 807-9300.)

THE DINNER PARTY
Neil Simon's new comedy is set in an opulent restaurant in Paris, and his six characters—three divorced couples—are not the usual transplanted, fish-out-of-water Simon-Americans of his "Suite" plays. They are actually French, or are meant to be. Despite having the trappings of a departure, the play is essentially traditional fare; the running, or limping, gags are in ready supply, and the secondhand shtick, often in the form of aeons-old alimony jokes, flows freely along this Boulevard of Broken Marriages. The generally swell cast—Len Cariou, John Ritter, Veanne Cox, Penny Fuller, Henry Winkler, and Jan Maxwell—is under the direction of John Rando. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/6/00.) (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

DOWN THE GARDEN PATHS
Eli Wallach and Anne Jackson lead the cast in a new four-couple comedy by Anne Meara. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 307-4100.)

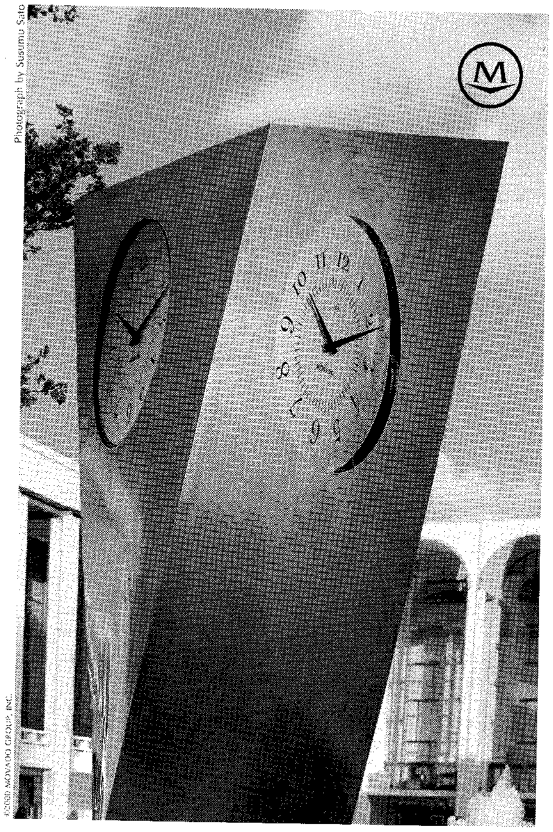
END OF THE WORLD PARTY
A comedy by Chuck Ranberg, about a group of men who rent a Fire Island house together each year. (47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

ENSEMBLE STUDIO THEATRE
Presenting "The Shaneequa Chronicles: The Making of a Black Woman," a solo coming-of-age play by Stephanie Berry (Wednesdays through Sundays), and "Armonk," a collection of short comedies by Sean Sutherland (Mondays and Tuesdays). (549 W. 52nd St. 247-4982.)

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY 2001: A SPOOF ODYSSEY
The latest edition of Gerard Alessandrini's ongoing musical satire of the players and the plays along the Great White Way. (Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200.)

FOUR GUYS NAMED JOSÉ . . . AND UNA MUJER NAMED MARIA
This crowd-pleasing, crayon-colored revue of Latin song and dance is knowingly broad and hammy. But the talented cast sends up the singers and songs that helped create Latin stereotypes and delivers the remaining material—dance songs, songs of nostalgia for one's homeland, songs of love, songs about women named Maria—with exuberant wit and affection. (Blue Angel, 323 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

THE FULL MONTY
The musical version of the 1997 movie, about a group of unemployed factory workers who try to earn some cash by stripping, is faithful to the original story—even though the locale has been shifted from the North of England to Buffalo. It has



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all the spirit and charm of the original but, as befits a Broadway production, on a much larger, pizzazzier scale. Instead of being touched, you're likely to be moved up out of your seat by the display of musical and choreographic bravura onstage. Early on, Terrence McNally's book and David Yazbek's songs strike notes of class consciousness and unemployment-related low male self-esteem a little too hard, but soon enough the show's winning good humor and inventiveness kick in, and if you don't find yourself laughing consistently (and tearing up occasionally), well, then, maybe you don't *deserve* to see six men prancing around in red G-strings. The terrific cast, which includes Patrick Wilson, John Ellison Conlee, André De Shields, Emily Skinner, and Kathleen Freeman, is under the fine direction of Jack O'Brien, and the delightful dancing is courtesy of Jerry Mitchell. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

John Moran, with cast members from his latest techno-opera, "Book of the Dead: Second Avenue," at the Public Theatre. Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

GAME SHOW
The action of Bob Walton and Jeffrey Finn's "play" clumsily shifts from a trivia contest between audience volunteers to scripted, behind-the-scenes backstabbing between the producer (Cheryl Stern) and the host (Michael McGrath) of the show within the show. The drama that unfolds during the "commercial breaks" is flat, but the participatory sequences are surprisingly amusing, if only because they involve laughing at the contestants (at a recent show, a professional woman defined a "gynephobe" as a person who is afraid of giants). (45 Bleecker, at 45 Bleecker St. 307-4100.)

GERSHWIN'S AMERICAN RHAPSODY
KT Sullivan and Mark Nadler star in a musical revue celebrating the works of George Gershwin. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 239-6200.)

GORE VIDAL'S THE BEST MAN
Gore Vidal's sophisticated, elegant, and damned entertaining 1960 play about the politics of politics, whose mots are as eerily accurate for Shrub and Al as they were, originally, for Adlai and Tricky Dick. Rather than a satire, the play is a comedy of manners (or of bad political manners) that shares with the eighteenth century an obsession with façade—its invention, manipulation, and exposure. Directed by Ethan McSweeny. (10/2/00) (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

THE GOREY DETAILS
A musical inspired by the works of the author-illustrator Edward Gorey. (Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

THE HOSTAGE
Brendan Behan's 1960 play is set in that year, a moment of relative peace in Ireland, and it raises the question of whether anyone other than a few fanatics really cared anymore about the country's entanglement with England. Set in a boarding house-cum-brothel run by a hero of the 1916 uprising, the show is an odd but stirring mix of song, dance, gibes, and storytelling; a plot slowly sneaks in, though, and turns it into an examination of how much the Irish of the time did mind English rule and of whether they could stand to use terrorism as a weapon. Forty years on, Behan's political views are still fresh, and the play itself is a fascinating mixture of tragedy and fun, like a good pub tale. The talented cast is directed by Charlotte Moore. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes Dec. 10.)

JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK
Even a spirited performance by Jim Nelson, as the feckless, braggart "paycock" of the title, can't get this otherwise flat Roundabout Theatre production of Sean O'Casey's 1924 tragicomedy off the ground. The script dramatizes the reach of Irish political violence and its appalling personal costs, but here most of the characters aren't played engagingly enough to interest the audience. As a result, a compelling tragedy has been transformed into a collection of somewhat amusing and occasionally sad clichés. (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)

KIT MARLOWE
David Grimm's drama examines the tempestuous life of the Elizabethan playwright Christopher Marlowe. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200. Closes Dec. 3.)

LES MIZRAHI
The fashion designer Isaac Mizrahi has an endearing and winning personality, which sets this cabaret act aglow. But Mizrahi's mélange of songs, conversation, and sewing has been staged and rehearsed to death by Richard Move. It's not until he steps offstage and into the house for a brief improvised interlude to dole out Rice Krispies treats that the audience gets to experience the real Mizrahi. (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 239-6200. Closes Nov. 25.)

LIFEGAME
A show by the British troupe Improbable Theatre, in which a different onstage guest's life story becomes the basis of the improv drama each night. (Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200.)

THE LIGHT OUTSIDE
From the Flea Theatre, a black domestic comedy by Kate Robin. (41 White St., between Broadway and Church St. 226-2407.)

LIVING IN THE WIND
Cheryl Freeman and Chad L. Coleman portray married ex-slaves trying to rebuild their lives after the Civil War, in a romantic drama by Michael Bradford. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

LYPSINKA! THE BOXED SET
The star (a.k.a. John Epperson) makes her first concert appearance in seven years. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 307-4100.)

MAYBE BABY, IT'S YOU
Love in the big city, explained with many laughs by the show's accomplished writer-performers, Charlie Shanian and Shari Simpson. There's an undercurrent of sweetness and longing which makes the evening more than a series of skits. (Theatre at St. Luke's, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

MINT THEATRE COMPANY
Presenting a double bill of one-acts: Harley Granville-Barker's "Farewell to the Theatre" and George Kelley's "The Flattering Word." (311 W. 43rd St. 315-0231.)

PROOF
The Manhattan Theatre Club's staging of David Auburn's drama, starring Mary-Louise Parker, has reopened on Broadway. Daniel Sullivan is the director. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

RICHARD III
The Pearl Theatre Company's version of Shakespeare's play. (80 St. Mark's Pl. 505-3401. Closes Dec. 17.)

THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW
Richard O'Brien's 1975 cult musical, directed by Christopher Ashley and choreographed by Jerry Mitchell. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

SAVED OR DESTROYED
Rattlestick starts the season with a Harry Kondoleon festival, beginning with this previously unproduced comedy. (Rattlestick Theatre, 224 Waverly Pl. 206-1515.)

THE SEARCH FOR SIGNS OF INTELLIGENT LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE
Lily Tomlin returns to Broadway in Jane Wagner's 1985 multicharacter solo show. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE SYRINGA TREE
A tour-de-force solo drama, written by and starring South African native and first-time playwright Pamela Gien, who gives an extraordinary performance in all twenty-three roles. It's a love story, really, about the strong, lasting bond between a white girl and her black nanny in South Africa, which begins in 1965 and continues through the following twenty years of turbulent and violent upheavals over apartheid. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 307-4100.)

TABLETOP
Rob Ackerman's real-time comedy, a behind-the-scenes look at television-commercial making. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

THE TALE OF THE ALLERGIST'S WIFE
Charles Busch's satire of New York intellectual angst, staged by Manhattan Theatre Club, has

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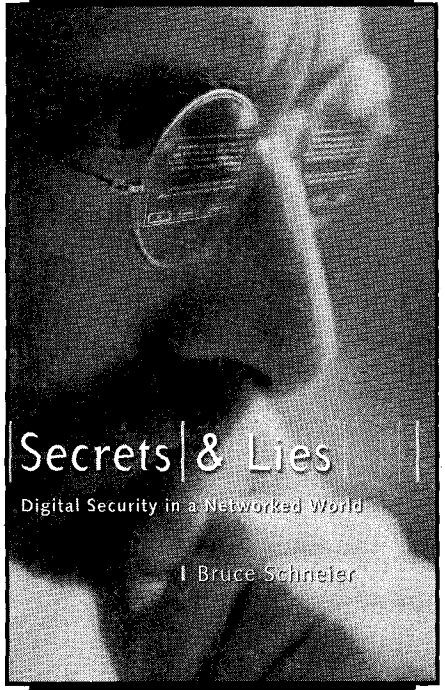

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moved to Broadway. Linda Lavin, Tony Roberts, and Michele Lee star. Lynn Meadow is the director. (3/20/00) (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

TALLULAH HALLELUJAH!
Tovah Feldshuh's engaging portrait of Tallulah Bankhead is set in 1956, at a U.S.O. benefit, where the stage-and-screen siren (played by Feldshuh) regales the audience with the lowdown on her life, several marvellous standards, and a bunch of charmingly dirty limericks. (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

THE UNEXPECTED MAN
There are only two actors in this small gem by Yasmina Reza, the author of "Art," but they are not just any two—they are Alan Bates and the magnificent Eileen Atkins, who are sharing a compartment on a Paris-to-Frankfurt train. He is a writer, and she, unbeknownst to him, is his ideal reader; their private reflections weave around and play off each other until the two passengers finally address each other directly. Reza's artfulness in presenting their thoughts—his discontent, her insightful analysis of his books and rueful reminiscences of friendships—makes this a very grownup play about separateness and connection, about the art of life. Directed by Matthew Warchus. (11/6/00) (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

WHAT THE BUTLER SAW
The New Group's staging of Joe Orton's 1969 play stars Chloë Sevigny, Dylan Baker, Lisa Emery, and Peter Frechette. (Theatre at St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370.

CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.

CONTACT
Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.

COPENHAGEN
Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE COUNTESS
Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

DINNER WITH FRIENDS
Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave., at 14th St. 239-6200.

DIRTY BLONDE
Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

FOSSE
Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

FULLY COMMITTED
Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.

JITNEY
Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 505-0700.

KISS ME, KATE
Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.

THE MUSIC MAN
Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.

SWING!
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
After its annual gala (Nov. 21 at 8), the company returns in "The Nutcracker." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 870-5570. Nov. 24 at 8, Nov. 25 at 2 and 8, and Nov. 26 at 1 and 5.)

"MICHAEL MOSCHEN IN MOTION"
The MacArthur-grant-winning juggler offers recently invented techniques along with his trademark maneuvers, including one in which he walks through a wooden triangle while keeping multiple rubber balls bouncing multidirectionally. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Nov. 21-24 at 8, Nov. 25 at 2 and 8, and Nov. 26 at 2 and 7:30.)

PARSONS DANCE COMPANY
The choreographers David Parsons and Robert Battle present seventy-five minutes of work, including the company's strobe-lit signature, "Caught," and "Strange Humors," a staged argument that takes the form of a tango. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. Nov. 21 at 7, Nov. 22 and Nov. 24-25 at 2 and 7, and Nov. 26 at 3.)

"ANOTHER TELEPATHIC THING"
Big Dance Theatre, under the direction of Paul Lazar and choreographer Annie-B Parson, recasts Mark Twain's "The Mysterious Stranger" as the story of Satan in L.A., using sections from actual Hollywood audition tapes. (The Performing Garage, 35 Wooster St. 966-3651. Nov. 22 and Nov. 24-25 at 8. Through Dec. 9.)

"PEARL RIVER"
The choreographers Stacy Dawson and David Neumann mix chop-socky fight sequences with the stylized movement of Chinese opera in a series of duets set to the soundtrack for Jackie Chan's "Spiritual Kung Fu." (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. Nov. 24-25 at 10:30 and Nov. 26 at 8.)

TABLES FOR TWO

PEARL OYSTER BAR
18 Cornelia St. (691-8211)—Once a waiter calls you in from the cold (Pearl doesn't take reservations, so it's you and the sidewalk until a couple of stools open up) and you're seated elbow to elbow at the marble bar or along the slim wall counter, you can, pardon the cliché, practically taste the summer salt air. Especially when a briny seafood cocktail (a sundae dish of ultra-fresh raw oysters and clams, chunks of lobster, a few huge shrimp, and a healthy dose of cocktail sauce) or a bucket of steamers arrives, along with a cold pint or a glass of something white.

The long, narrow interior is a minimalist take on the roadside stand, all gray and white with hurricane lanterns, a tin ceiling, a few kitchen antiques, and jumbo bottles of Tabasco. But just because Pearl is pristine don't think its version of the lobster roll will fall short of the wonderfully trashy mess you're accustomed to on the way to the beach. Actually, what you get is the old Ho-Jo version made sublime—a toasted, buttered hot-dog bun piled with cold, sweet meat drenched in lemony mayo and surrounded by a heap of salty shoestring fries. If you're still hungry after the roll—or, for that matter, after a roll accompanied by a bowl of smoky New England clam chowder and an exacting Caesar salad—ask the waiter for a platter of fried oysters, back in their shells again, on a thick layer of caper-rich tartar sauce. The more elevated chalkboard specials usually include two kinds of whole grilled fish, stuffed with fresh herbs and resting on a bed of vegetables; one pan-roasted fish; and, of course, a whole lobster, expertly boiled or grilled.

The crowd varies according to the clock. Go at six and it's a casual, pearls-and-flannel crowd of Village regulars. After nine the place really starts cooking; through the front window you can watch the blasé hipsters waiting in a ragged queue along tree-lined Cornelia, leaning against cars and lampposts, smoking cigarettes, and slyly checking out one another's cool new boots. (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner, Saturdays for dinner only. Entrées $17-$25.)

—*Emily Nunn*

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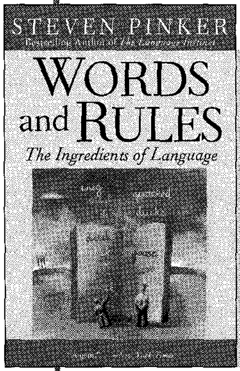

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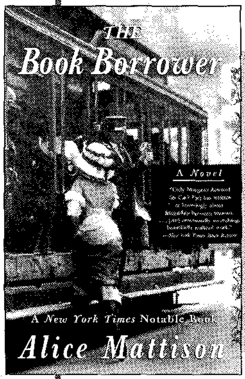

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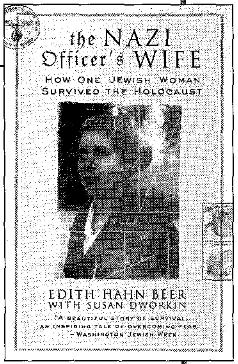

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NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

BLUES TRAVELER
John Popper, a corpulent harmonica virtuoso and the leader of this ensemble, became the nineties' most unlikely rock star. With its ragtag collection of tie-dye-clad technicians, Blues Traveler tapped into the jam-happy vein of the Grateful Dead and the Allman Brothers and hit it big in 1995 with the quadruple-platinum album "Four." It hasn't been all good times. Last year Popper underwent an angioplasty, and weeks later the group's founding bassist, Bobby Sheehan, passed away. But the Travelers live to tour, and now—with Popper slimmed down by more than a hundred pounds—they're back where they belong, on the road. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. Nov. 22 at 7:30.)

BELA FLECK & THE FLECKTONES
After more than a decade of making albums filled with bizarre musical juxtapositions (try funky bluegrass), Fleck, a baby-faced banjo veteran with truly mind-boggling technique, is poised for his first mainstream breakthrough. His latest CD, "Outbound," features vocal contributions from Shawn Colvin and Yes singer Jon Anderson and continues showcasing the banjo—never the sexiest of instruments—in unexpectedly inspired contexts. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. Nov. 24 at 8.)

MARILYN MANSON
Back in the mid-nineties, with the release of two worrisome if irresistible CDs, "Antichrist Superstar" and "Mechanical Animals," Manson became pop music's baddest bad boy: a ghoulishly androgynous manifestation of angst and alienation who channelled the Marquis de Sade by way of Alice Cooper. Then Manson's star began to dim, thanks to guilt by association following the Columbine massacre and the ascendancy of other parental nightmares, such as the Detroit rapper Eminem. On Manson's latest effort, "Holy Wood in the Shadow of the Valley of Death," the lanky renegade tries to steal back a little thunder. (Hammerstein Ballroom, Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. 564-4882. Nov. 24-25 at 8.)

MOE.
This jamming quintet has performed literally hundreds of times each year since its inception, nine years ago in Buffalo, New York. Now that Phish, the mother of all modern jam bands, is on hiatus, moe. has the chance to bring its mix of country rock, jazz, and funk to the masses. How hard will it be for the Phishheads to remake themselves as moe.rons? Not hard at all, given the way these boys play. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. Nov. 25 at 7:30.)

ARLO GUTHRIE
Woody's son returns with his annual rendition of his counterculture anthem about a draft-eligible folksinger getting arrested in Housatonic, Massachusetts—along with dozens of other folk-flavored rockers. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Nov. 25 at 8.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BOTTOM LINE
15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Nov. 24: **Lucy Kaplansky**, a self-proclaimed folk hybrid of Tammy Wynette and Elaine from "Seinfeld," rides high on the success of "Ten Year Night," her most recent studio recording and the first since she dropped her New York City-based private psychology practice to record and focus on her music full time. A truly gifted performer, Kaplansky burns through a bubbly, modest stage persona with strong flat-picking and a bag full of enchanting songs. With the hard-touring Bostonian **Ellis Paul.** Nov. 25: **Marshall Crenshaw**, who spent the early eighties reincarnating Buddy Holly in the era of power pop and has never since reascended to those heights.

Nov. 26: For the first time in twelve years, the Seattle guitar-and-vocal trio **Uncle Bonsai,** which gave the world such songs as "Penis Envy" and "Cheerleaders on Drugs," returns to New York City.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Nov. 23: **They Might Be Giants** offers its annual Thanksgiving family show. Nov. 24-26: **Yo La Tengo,** the best thing to come out of Hoboken since Francis Albert Sinatra.

FEZ
380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—A comfortable neo-Moroccan bar hidden inside the Time Café. Nov. 26: The act put on by the three-woman operation **Betty** is a sort of cabaret gone haywire, with elements of funk and rock, performance art, satire, and standup comedy. The **Mingus Big Band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Nov. 22 and Nov. 24-25: **Deep Banana Blackout** is yet another jam band in the tradition of Phish and moe. But this four-year-old septet from Bridgeport, Connecticut, is steeped in funk, as its opening acts testify. Nov. 22 features the former P-Funk and Talking Heads keyboard genius **Bernie Worrell** and his band, the Woo Warriors. On the other two nights, the bassist **George Porter, Jr.,** who was a founding member of the Meters, warms up the crowd with his band Runnin' Pardners. ♦ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the Society, call 696-9737.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—Nov. 25: The **Walkmen.** A few of the downtown aesthetes who brought the world Jonathan Fire*eater have banded together again. Led by Hamilton Leithauser, whose Robert Plant-like plaintive growl balances the velveteen lushness of the organist Walter Martin, the group produces a sound that has at once an enigmatic, funereal quality and a pop shimmer.

MAKOR
35 W. 67th St. (601-1000)—Nov. 25: **Antibalas,** a fourteen-piece multiracial Afro-beat ensemble from Williamsburg, Brooklyn, which takes its musical and political inspiration from Fela Kuti. Its shows are a thunderous mass of rhythms, horns, and bass.

RODEO BAR
375 Third Ave., at 27th St. (683-6500)—Nov. 27: The **Moonlighters.** This charming local band (two singers, two ukuleles, an upright bass, and a steel guitar, the last played exquisitely by former Helmet bassist Henry Bogdan) tackles swinging Hawaiian tunes from the twenties and thirties, such as "Hula Blues" and "Honolulu March," along with a few originals in the same style.

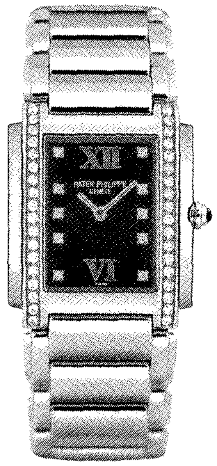
WETLANDS
161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—Nov. 24: The trio **Dispatch** cranks out rock and vocal harmonies with a heavy reggae influence that sounds more powerful than anything you'd expect three people to create. With **Cabaret Diosa,** a nine-piece Boulder, Colorado, Latin-music ensemble, whose members impersonate a fictional nineteen-fifties Cuban big band and enliven their sets with comic skits. Let the mambo circus begin.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—The vocalist **Susannah McCorkle,** here through Nov. 25, knows how to be sophisticated without making a big deal of it. Literate and knowledgeable about the history of her art, she takes her audience on a jazz-inflected stroll through the past seventy years of American popular song. Dining.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
243 W. 42nd St. (997-4144)—Nov. 25: It's always a treat to see the once and future tenor-saxophone colossus **Sonny Rollins** in a club, even if he is a wildly inconsistent performer. Rollins has been in a nostalgic mood of late, recording Bing Crosby tunes from the thirties and songs from Dorothy Lamour films, though after he's done recomposing them onstage you'll think he jotted them down just last week.

PATEK PHILIPPE
GENEVE



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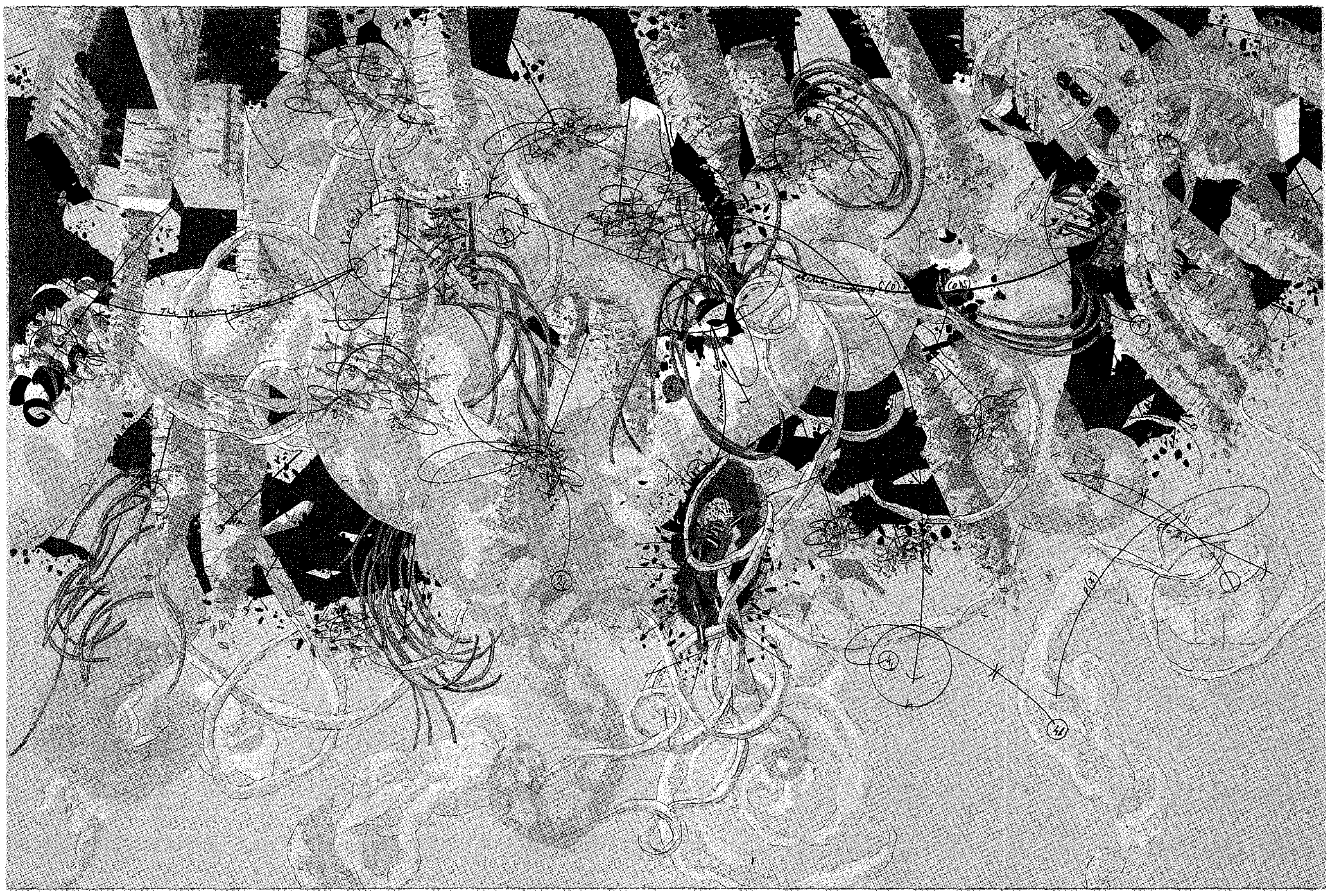


2000: A SPACE ODYSSEY *Matthew Ritchie's hectic paintings and constructions deploy skittery shapes and abstruse notations to illustrate ideas from cosmological science and mythology. The controversial thirty-six-year-old artist and writer (whose accompanying prose blends arch braininess and louche slang à la William Burroughs) dotes on early instants of the big bang, when everything—which is to say,* everything*—was cheek by jowl. The colorful ruckuses of the paintings, on view at the Andrea Rosen gallery through November 25, are fun at first glance. Thereafter, good luck. Ritchie's didactic mania advances a current science craze among young artists, most of whom zero in on genetics or neurology. Ritchie zeroes out, you might say. As a stenographer of the universe, he excites some people. Others may be reminded of an old Mick Jagger line: "Sittin' here thinkin' just how sharp I am."—Peter Schjeldahl*

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Nov. 26: The **McCoy Tyner** trio. Even if Tyner had vanished into the shadows upon leaving the John Coltrane quartet, in 1966, he'd still be revered as one of the most individualistic players of an era that demanded individualism as a birthright. But Tyner didn't fade away, nor did he delve into the electronic age. While others around him turned to fusion to ensnare a new audience, Tyner's innate power spared him. These days, this keyboard wizard exhibits his thrilling Tatum-meets-Trane maneuverings with undiminished panache. His guest is the flutist **Dave Valentin,** who has been celebrating Latin music since long before it became the flavor *de la semana.*

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through Dec. 31, **Bobby Short.** ♦ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **Barbara Carroll** is in attendance through Dec. 30.

CITY HALL
131 Duane St., between Church St. and West Broadway (227-7777)—The **Charles Mingus Orchestra** (in on Fridays) now augments the well-entrenched Mingus Big Band (Thursdays at Fez) and concentrates on the late bassist-composer's more formal works.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (339-4095)—**Barbara Cook** is in command of this urbane dinner-and-music room through Nov. 25. Her voice remains almost defiantly that of the nineteen-fifties Broadway ingénue, and her material is as winning as a gardenia corsage. Dining.

IRIDIUM
48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—You can almost hear the grass on the savanna rustle when **Abdullah Ibrahim** (here with his trio through Nov. 26) stirs up a lolling South African piano vamp, and his bassist and drummer lock together to expertly ride the undulating rhythms. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Through Nov. 26: The **Gary Bartz** quintet. The fallow years of the eighties are a long-ago memory for this brilliant alto-and-soprano saxophonist, who is probably best known for his early-seventies stint with Miles Davis. Bartz is playing even better than he did then, having traded in his dalliances with funk fusion for serious modal-bop improvising. Dining.

RUE B
188 Avenue B (358-1700)—**Joel Forrester,** the maestro of the wonderful People Like Us ensemble, remains a most agreeably eclectic pianist, and among the most undervalued of jazz composers. The sheer pleasure he brings to a panoply of styles, and to the individual way he absorbs them all, denotes comfort rather than scholarly erudition. He's enthroned here at the keyboard Monday nights in November.

SWEET BASIL
88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—There's a nearly sensual pleasure in watching great drummers like **Victor Lewis** (here with his quintet through Nov. 26); every move is smooth, perfectly balanced, and seemingly effortless. For the sublime lift he brings to the bandstand, Lewis's bandmates should pay him. Dining.

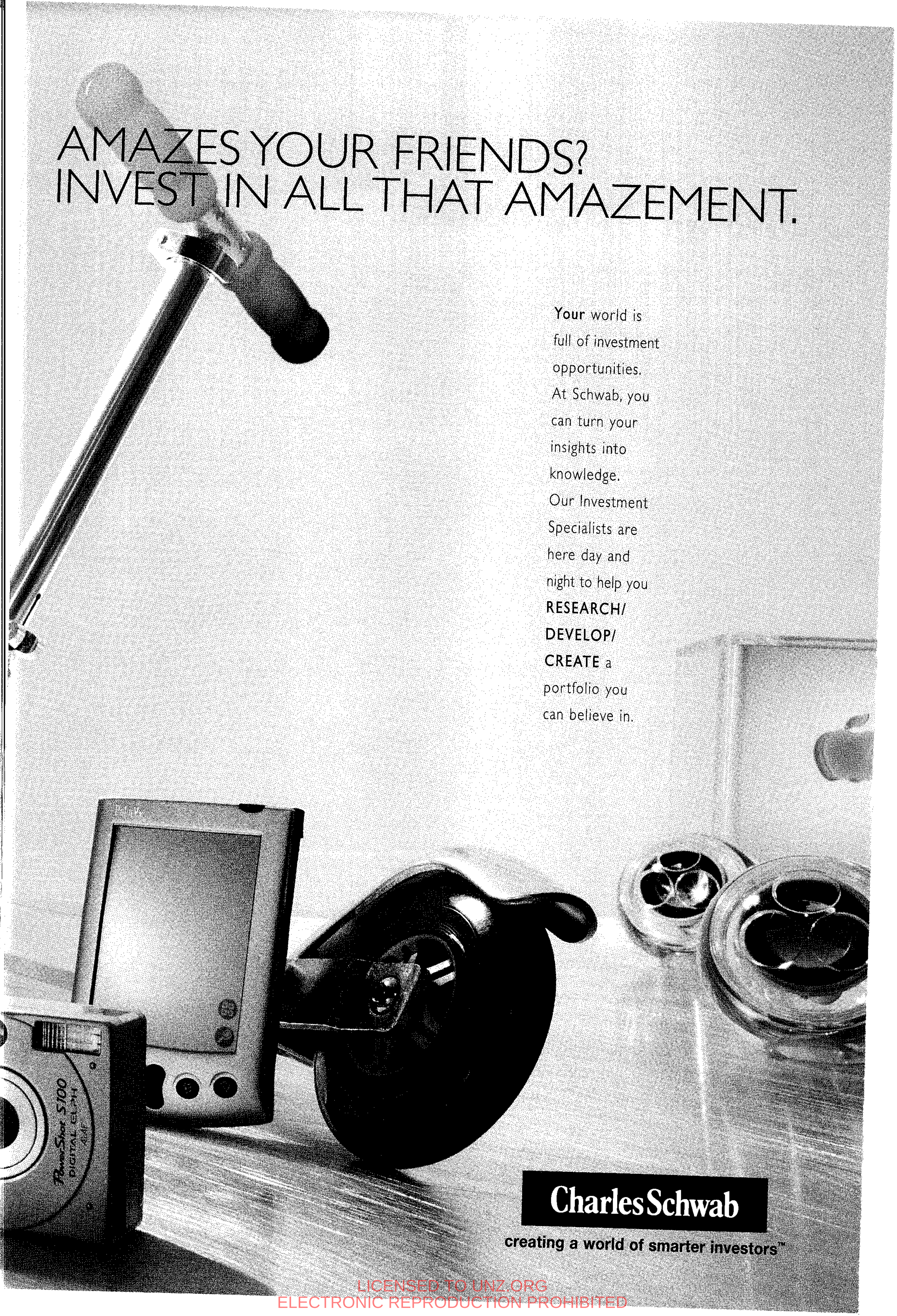
TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (358-7503)—Nov. 22: The drummer **Susie Ibarra,** a veteran of the rhythmic contortions of David S. Ware's quartet, gives a solo show. Nov. 24: The **Oliver Lake Steel Quartet** and the **Charles Gayle** trio. The saxophonist Lake, an avant-garde jazz icon and a mainstay of the World Saxophone Quartet, has always had a taste for the tropics in his side projects. (Witness the reggae-jazz hybrid of his Jump Up! ensemble.) Lake's latest Caribbean-infused band incorporates the steel drum as a lead instrumental voice. / The saxophonist Gayle defends his neo-expressionist turf, eschewing chord changes and polite tonalities for raw and focussed emotion.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—**"The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliot Collection."** Sixteen hundred years before artists like Lawrence Weiner and Joseph Kosuth began using text in art, the Chinese cultivated the art of calligraphy. This exhibition, billed as the most comprehensive ever assembled in the West, features more than a hundred examples of the graceful form, described

Continued on page 31, overleaf.



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a rule, though, Piper sticks the knife in without buttering up. Another monitor, in front of an armchair supplied with a box of tissues, plays a tape of the Rodney King beating. In the next room, with an identical arrangement of armchair and tissues, the King monitor is replaced with a mirror. Through Jan. 21. (Open Wednesdays and Sundays, noon to 6; Thursdays through Saturdays, noon to 8.)

GALLERIES-UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

ERNST CARAMELLE
The spirit of fresco lives on in the luminous matte surfaces of this Austrian artist's watercolors. Though he paints on gessoed panels rather than wet plaster, Caramelle gets the texture, and he has something of the fresco painter's taste for architectural form—his bright trapezoids and rectangles line up so that we seem to be looking into sparely appointed rooms, hallways, and courtyards. But since these neatly fitted geometric shapes don't quite match up, we're left to enjoy them as exercises in spatial ambiguity. The result is a spare, dimensionally enriched abstraction, as if one of Giotto's assistants had gone to school with Gropius. Through Nov. 25. (Markey, 42 E. 76th St. 517-9892.)

DONALD JUDD
Here are yet more works by the late Donald Judd, these from the artist's relatively baroque last years. Many are on the wall and one is on the floor; all are fiercely glamorous. It is ever plainer that Judd was less a radical sculptor than a revolutionary in decoration. For over thirty years, the attitudinizing beauty of his box variations told architectural space how to behave. Toward the end, he boosted his work's seduction quotient with shiny or rusted metals or raw wood, clarion colors of enamel or pigmented fibreglass, and practically musical progressions of form in multipart pieces. Still, Judd's exasperated, utopian severity remains in force. We viewers, while authorized to be ravished, are not to start imagining that we are worthy. Through Nov. 25. (Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 421-3292.)

JAUME PLENSA
In his first New York exhibition since 1989, this Catalan sculptor turns to "Macbeth" for inspiration, albeit obliquely. The centerpiece is an installation titled "Banquo's Banquet," after Shakespeare's bloody ghost. Glass spheres are laid out on velvet cushions, spelling pairs of words. Some of the pairings are familiar ("heaven, hell" or "sweet, sour"), others less so ("saliva, chaos"). The materials are alluring, but the significance is difficult to extract. Through Dec. 22. (Gray, 1018 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 472-8787.)

Short List

TONY CRAGG
Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St.
977-7160. Through Dec. 30.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN
Lawrence Rubin Greenberg
Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.
445-0444. Through Dec. 9.

ERIC FISCHL
Mary Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.
752-2929. Through Dec. 16.

XENIA HAUSNER
Forum, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.
355-4545. Through Dec. 30.

R. B. KITAJ
Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. 541-4900.
Through Dec. 2.

JOHN MCCRACKEN
Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St.
517-8677. Through Jan. 6.

JILL MOSER
Ganz, 25 E. 73rd St. 535-1977.
Through Dec. 14.

GEORGE TOOKER / BEN SHAHN
DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.
247-2111. Through Dec. 29.

CY TWOMBLY
Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 77th St.
744-2313. Through Jan. 27.

GALLERIES-CHELSEA

BEATRIZ MILHAZES
This is a victory-lap show. In her widely praised first and second New York exhibitions, Milhazes presented startling ornamental images, aswim with rainbow-colored rosettes, arabesques, and the occasional peace sign. Here she seems to be catching her breath. Though generally similar to the earlier work, these seven new paintings are far less intricately ambitious—they're pretty, rather than bewitching. Only the smallest, "O Soldado," a nosegay of spiralling plum, orange, and copper petals, shows the artist in full bloom. Through Nov. 25. (Thorp, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St. 691-6565.)

ZHANG XIAOGANG
These paintings, whose theme seems to be "Chineseness," look kitschy at first and they may look kitschy at last, but it's time we got to know this forty-two-year-old Szechuan art star. Huge heads of sad, big-eyed boys—think of the American surrealist George Tooker—are beautifully painted in grisaille with red tints. Somewhere in each picture, patches of another color appear—they look overlaid but are actually scraped down into the tooth of the canvas. Zhang's work readily elicits the word "haunting," but he is masterly and a coming international presence. Through Nov. 25. (Protetch, 511 W. 22nd St. 633-6999.)

Short List

POLLY APFELBAUM
D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St.
352-9460. Through Dec. 23.

MEL BOCHNER
Sonnabend, 536 W. 22nd St. 627-1018.
Through Dec. 20.

OLAFUR ELIASSON
Bonakdar Jancou, 521 W. 21st St.
414-4144. Through Dec. 2.

DAMIEN HIRST
Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 741-1111.
Through Dec. 16.

ZOE LEONARD
Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105.
Through Nov. 25.

LOT/EK
Urbach, 526 W. 26th St. 627-0974.
Through Dec. 22.

MATTHEW RITCHIE
Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 627-6000.
Through Nov. 25.

SUE WILLIAMS
303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121.
Through Dec. 16.

GALLERIES-DOWNTOWN

KIM DINGLE
If anyone really deserves to be called a bad-girl artist, it is Dingle, who paints rampaging tykes in frilly dresses and counsels younger artists to "take off all your clothes, put on a diaper, and regress." In the misbehavior department, Dingle's protagonists, a pair of enfants terribles named Fatty and Fudge, continue to lead by example: in recent monoprint-like paintings on vellum, the girls brawl, puke, moon, scrawl "SHET" on blackboards, and finally scale a schoolyard fence and light out for the territories. While some may find all this tomboyish mayhem a little too "empowering," the best pictures seem genuinely raucous, like a pint-size alternative to the W.W.F. Through Dec. 22. (Sperone Westwater, 121 Greene St. 431-3685.)

"AMERICAN BRICOLAGE"
The twelve artists here remind us that "bricolage" is a French word but a Yankee phenomenon. The group recycles a Dumpster's worth of ordinary parts and reassembles them into unlikely objects, from a flock of birds roused out of Medaglia d'Oro coffee cans (Alexander Calder) to a functioning toilet made of foam core (Tom Sachs). The centerpiece is a gargantuan bagpipe, constructed from plastic bags, PVC pipe, and mailing tubes by the inimitable Tim Hawkinson. Wheezing out a slow-motion version of "Amazing Grace," Hawkinson's monstrous bladders turn the familiar melody into an anthem of ingenuity. Through Dec. 22. (Sperone Westwater, 142 Greene St. 431-3685.)

"THE TEMPORARY TOY THEATRE MUSEUM"
HERE has packed its small space with what looks at first like school projects. In fact, the dioramas in board, collage, and glitter are historical and contemporary doll-house-size theatres, sets for the miniature staging of "literary classics, ancient texts, visual documentaries, animations, miniature circuses, and abstract studies." Some require that viewers peek through tiny windows; others present their stages in the round—or in sardine tins, steamer trunks, or bureau drawers. Through Dec. 2. (145 Sixth Ave., at Spring St. 647-0202.)

Short List

LAURIE SIMMONS AND PETER WHEELWRIGHT
Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 343-7300.
Through Dec. 2.

GALLERIES-BROOKLYN

ANTRIM CASKEY / MICHAEL CRAWFORD / ANDY FRIEDMAN
Caskey photographs Crawford, who paints enormous canvases of mobsters at ease, while Friedman daydreams in soft pencil about girls. Their art is spread out over three levels at Micheline's—a watering hole on yet another newly colonized block of Brooklyn—where it all works well together and with the setting: Caskey's close, jittery black-and-white prints hang around the dance floor, Crawford's dinner-with-organized-crime scenes loom over the dining tables, and Friedman's romantic visions hover around the dark make-out space downstairs. Through Dec. 10. (629 Vanderbilt Ave., at Saint Mark's Ave. 718-623-6277.)

JANE FINE
Fine's drawings look like Tetris as seen by M. C. Escher under psychedelic influence. Her painted work—layers of detailed, diagrammatic ink patterns over and under bright pastel drips—suggests "Yellow Submarine." Whatever the medium, these are decidedly abstract works happily rich in Pop color and texture. Through Dec. 18. (Pierogi 2000, 177 N. Ninth St. 718-599-2144.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

CHRISTIE'S
Nov. 22 at 10 A.M.: The second and final day of a two-part auction of Latin-American paintings. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.)

CHRISTIE'S EAST
The house holds three sales on Nov. 28. At 10 A.M.: American Indian art and objects. ♦ At 1: A wide range of memorabilia related to the American West, including paintings, posters, household objects, and a selection of work by Edward H. Bohlin, saddle-maker to future Presidents Johnson and Reagan and numerous Hollywood stars. ♦ At 3:30: Arms and armor from around the world. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0400.)

by the eleventh-century poet Huang Tinjian as "a picture of the mind." Though an understanding of the Chinese language would enhance the experience, it is by no means a requirement. Often the characters seem more choreographed than drawn with ink and brush: witness the looping arabesques of the Ming-dynasty artist Dong Qichang or the angular lyricism (think Martha Graham) of Zhou Liangong. Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"The Year One: Art of the Ancient World East and West,"** a selection of antiquities from the permanent collection, all of which were created around 1 A.D. Through Jan. 14. ♦ **"Art and the Empire City"** presents paintings, photographs, and decorative art from one of New York's early periods of irrational exuberance, between the completion of the Erie Canal, in 1825, and the beginning of the Civil War, in 1861. Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"The Golden Deer of Eurasia: Scythian and Sarmatian Treasures from the Russian Steppes."** Through Feb. 4. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—**"Open Ends,"** the third and final installment of **"MOMA 2000,"** the yearlong exhibition devoted to the art of the past century, covers art from 1960 to the present. Like its predecessors, the current show is divided into segments; this first one includes several large-scale works and installations, by Cai Guo-Qiang, James Rosenquist, Pipilotti Rist, Cindy Sherman, and Gerhard Richter, which suggest the themes that the later segments amplify. Through Jan. 2. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—One design icon salutes another: the museum devotes its spiralling Frank Lloyd Wright spaces to an exhibition that measures the impact of Giorgio Armani, the original relaxed-fit couturier. Through Jan. 17. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Edward Steichen began as a pictorialist, photographing the sweet and fuzzy scenes fashionable in the first decades of the twentieth century. Later, he began experimenting with sharper focus and stronger lines, turning still-lifes of vegetables into stark modernist abstractions, and he came to see photography as a way to make a strong and immediate impression. Not coincidentally, his commercial work for magazines and advertisements became highly salable. Steichen's celebrity portraits—of Garbo and Dietrich for *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*—still look contemporary. Through Feb. 4. ♦ **"Roni Horn: Still Water (The River Thames, for Example), 1999."** Through Jan. 14. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—A retrospective devoted to Lee Krasner ends its national tour in the artist's birthplace. Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Hip-Hop Nation: Roots, Rhymes, and Rage"** presents videos, clothing and accessories, manuscripts of lyrics, F.B.I. letters, magazine covers, and installations that catalogue reactions to the genre. Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"Gold of the Nomads: Scythian Treasures from Ancient Ukraine."** Through Jan. 21. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
583 Broadway (219-1222)—Adrian Piper isn't much for production values, but that only means that she gets a viewer's attention faster. This retrospective opens with a pair of grainy videos; one is a plain loop of the artist dancing alone, the second a deadpan lecture on Piper's racial makeup (her parents' birth certificates, reproduced on a wall, are marked "white" and "octoroon"). These give way to the most staggering video, "Funk Lessons," which plays in its own room, perhaps to contain viewers' sounds of amazement. In it, Piper stages a dance workshop for Berkeley students, beginning at the blackboard and moving out to the classroom floor. She's a calm and generous teacher who deals with the mysteries of race, telling the students, "You can learn. It's environment, not heredity." As

OFF THE AVENUE AND ON-LINE

Gadget Inspector

Back in 1943, Thomas Watson, the chairman of I.B.M., said, "I think there is a world market for maybe five computers." It's easy to have similar doubts about the newest high-tech toys. Digital-camera watches and MP3 players might seem like bizarre extravagances now, but they'll soon be as ever-present as cell phones or DVD players.

One of the most coveted gadgets of this year's holiday season won't be out until the middle of January, but Amazon.com is already accepting pre-orders for the **KERBANGO 100E INTERNET RADIO** ($300), a blue-and-gray slab of plastic that may forever change the way we tune in to audio broadcasts. Although it's fairly simple to listen to streaming feeds from the world's radio stations over any computer, the Kerbango makes the process even simpler, mimicking the tuning-dial interface of a traditional transistor model. One caveat: don't bother with the Kerbango if you're accessing the Net over a dial-up connection; it requires a broadband connection, either D.S.L. or cable.

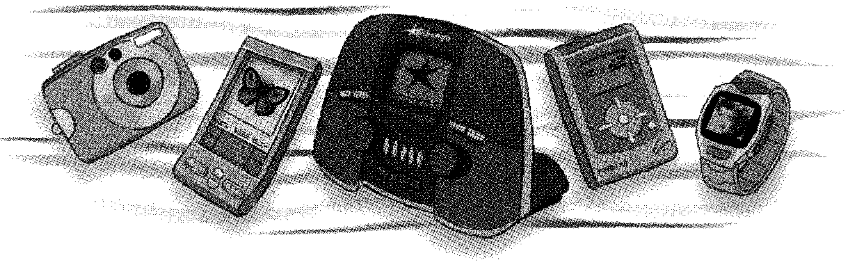
In the eighties, Casio digital watches went above and beyond the call of duty, allowing their wearers to play simple video games and store telephone numbers. But time marches on, and so do the non-chronometric capabilities of Casio timepieces. In keeping with the company's new slogan, "The Unexpected Extra," the latest batch of Casios includes a watch that plays MP3 files, a watch that uses global-positioning-system navigation technology, and the most Jetsonian of the lot, the **WQV1-1CR WRIST CAMERA WATCH** ($200). Capable of storing up to a hundred low-resolution black-and-white images in its built-in memory, the WQV1 can also upload pictures to any home computer.

If you've decided to plunge headlong into the world of digital music, it might be wise to avoid the more gimmicky devices—MP3 technology has already been installed in everything from watches to cameras—and to invest in the **SENSORY SCIENCE RAVE: MP2200 MP3 PLAYER** ($280). Consistently rated among the top players, the Rave is fast, small (roughly the size of a deck of cards), and efficient (it runs for up to ten hours on a single AA battery). The one drawback, at least for Apple aficionados, is that it's PC-compatible only.

Canon has won fans worldwide with its Elph series of miniature cameras. The newest member of the family is the **POWERSHOT S100 DIGITAL ELPH** ($500), which combines the line's popular stainless-steel case with Canon's top-drawer digital-photography technology. The S100 is a two-megapixel camera (for those who wouldn't know a megapixel from a metatarsal, it's a term that refers to the amount of visual information stored in each image), which means that its picture quality approaches that of comparably priced traditional cameras.

The Palm organizers may have taken an early lead in the fight for portable-computing superiority, but Handspring has landed a few punches in the second round with its **VISOR HANDHELD** line. The Visor's strongest suit is its versatility: by plugging in additional modules, you can teach it new tricks, including digital photography, digital voice recording, MP3 playback, and even mobile telephony. Prices for this high-tech decathlete vary between $149 and $449 depending on the base model, and expansion modules run from $30 (for the Tiger Woods P.G.A. Tour game) to $269 (for the MP3 player).

—*Ben Greenman*



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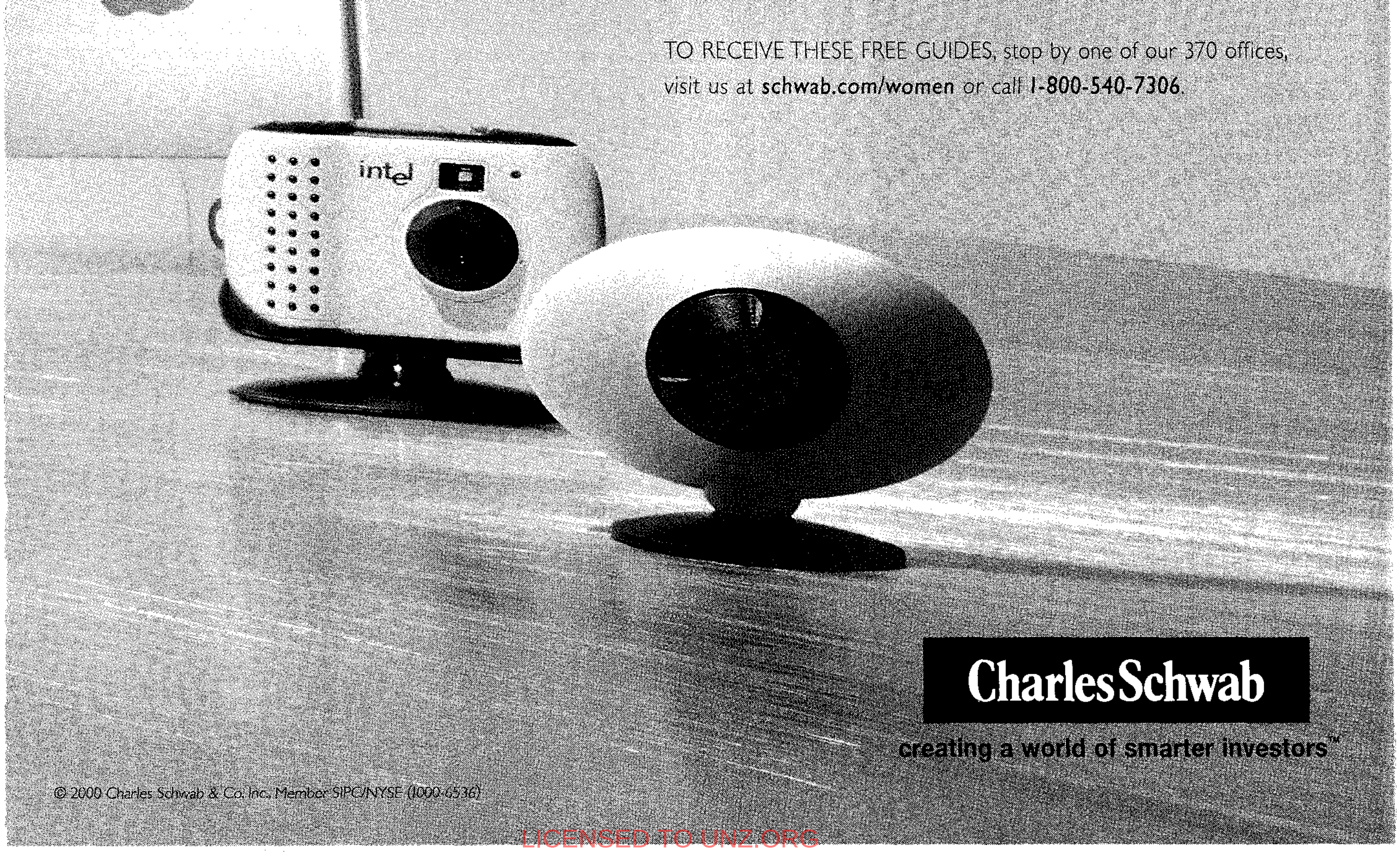

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PHILLIPS
Nov. 28 at 2:30: An auction of American art. The star lot is Benjamin West's 1771 masterpiece "The Death of General Wolfe." (406 E. 79th St. 570-4830.)

INTERNATIONAL 20TH CENTURY ARTS FAIR
Nov. 25-29: Fifty-six exhibitors offer a selection of art, furniture, and objects from the major design movements of the last hundred years. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. 642-8572.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

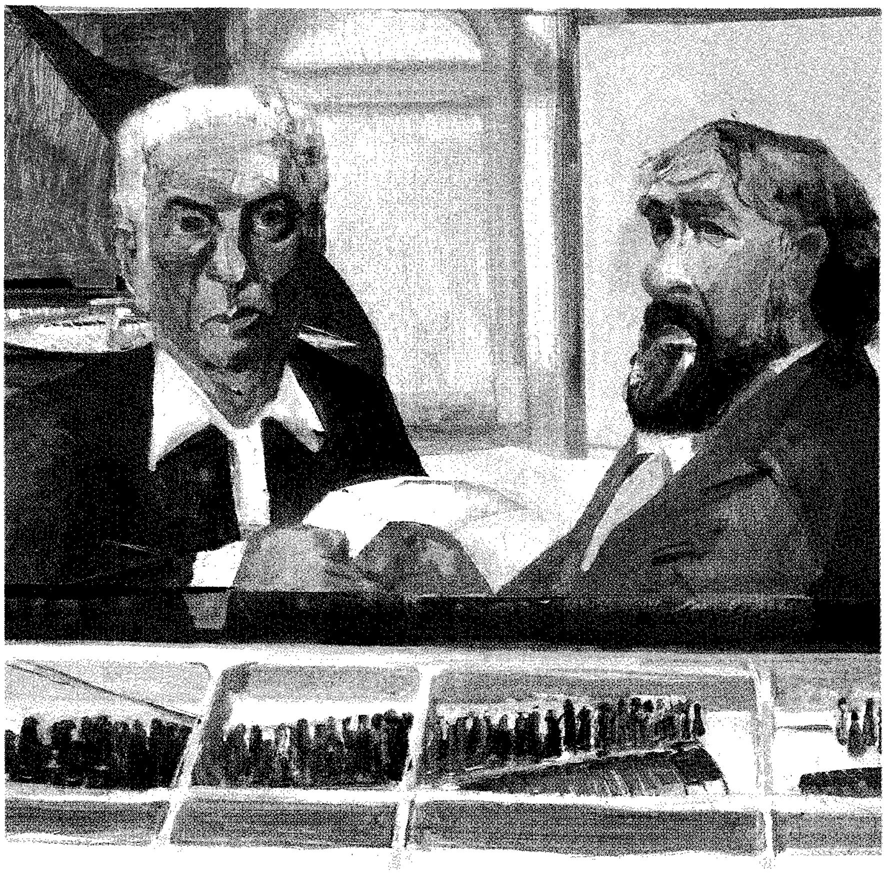
ROBERT ADAMS
More than two hundred of Adams's articulate black-and-white photographs, one complete set of each of two major series, are on show here: "What We Bought: The New World (Scenes from the Denver Metropolitan Area, 1970-74)" and "California (Views of the Los Angeles Basin, 1978-83)." The work surveys the dawn of suburbia in the title areas and, with its cautious and benevolent perspective, surpasses more recent, kitsch photographs of similar subject matter. Adams's point of view shifts comfortably from landscapes like "Long Beach, on Signal Hill," which shows a stand of fragile trees exiled to a ridge above the sprawling city, to portraits of consumers pushing half-full shopping carts through new supermarket aisles. Elsewhere in the gallery, Adams captures abandoned eucalyptus and palm trees rotting at the roots while tract homes and elevated freeways begin to multiply. Through Dec. 2. (Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 243-0200.)

INGE MORATH
As a young woman, Morath came to New York from Vienna and rang Saul Steinberg's doorbell. He answered wearing a paper-bag mask over his head; she took his picture. Their ensuing collaboration, hundreds of Morath photographs showing Steinberg and his friends in his masks, is represented here by more than fifty prints. Steinberg's drawings make these pictures interesting, but these pictures aren't the most interesting thing that ever happened to his work, which loses color, detail, and its characteristic dominance over his viewers' attention and imagination. The show may, more than anything, remind viewers to mourn his recent passing. Through Dec. 9. (Leica, 670 Broadway. 777-3051.)

GEORGE TICE
This tight retrospective of some thirty pictures made over the past forty-five years shows Tice's range as a photographer—landscape, still-life, and portraiture—and as a master of black-and-white printing. In Tice's hands, each negative yields a print that suits its visual and emotional content. "Shaker Interior, Sabbathday Lake, Maine," which shows a pitcher in a bowl, is rendered in an austere but elegant eight-by-ten-inch palladium print. "Country Road, Lancaster, Pennsylvania" is a small, almost snapshot-size, cold-toned silver print of a VW Bug headed straight for the lens. Among the largest prints in the show, and arguably one of the finest suburban nocturnes in photography, is "Petit's Mobil Station, Cherry Hill, New Jersey." In it, a giant, many-legged water tower just beyond the gas station's glowing lights seems to come to life, emerging from the print's rich darkness and moving toward the viewer's slowly adjusting eyes. Through Dec. 9. (Meyerowitz, 580 Broadway. 625-3434. Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 11 to 6.)

JAN VAN LEEUWEN
The startling self-portraits shown here were made using the cyanotype process, a cousin of the architectural blueprint. Their harsh lighting and deep Prussian blue seem ideally suited for capturing nightmares—van Leeuwen, who was born in 1932, says they're about living through the Nazi occupation of Amsterdam, and guilt over his missing Jewish classmates. In the rich browns of the technically similar Kallitype, he has also made a solemn and haunting Last Supper triptych, starring himself, nude, in every role. Through Dec. 2. (Gallery 24, at 552 W. 24th St. 414-0370.)

"IN PROCESS"
Fans of the top-shelf sixties and seventies minimalists and Conceptualists shown here will enjoy decoding their photographic ephemera—it's easy to recognize Donald Judd's cubic stacks in his snapshots of Southwestern ruins, and Ellsworth Kelly's shaped canvases in the severe shadows he captures on a Victorian house in Ghent, New York. Some of the work succeeds in its own right, including aerial photographs of Manhattan trimmed and perforated by Sol Le Witt (the street grid turns into one of *his* patterns) and a series documenting Barry Le Va's impermanent poppy-seed drawings. Most powerful, for its sense of raw possibility, is a 1968 study by earth artist Robert Smithson of a carved-up landscape in Germany—a site full of mud mounds and bulldozer tracks he'd been commissioned, perhaps destined, to mold into art. Through Nov. 25. (Marcus, 578 Broadway. 226-3200.)



Daniel Barenboim and Radu Lupu play Schubert, four-hands, at Carnegie Hall.

RICCARDO VECCHIO

Short List

ANDREW BUSH
Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 431-0147.
Through Dec. 12.

LUCINDA DEVLIN
Rodgers, 529 W. 20th St. 414-9810.
Through Dec. 16.

ABELARDO MORELL
Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766.
Through Dec. 2.

MARGARET MORTON
Burden, 20 E. 23rd St. 505-5555.
Through Nov. 30.

CINDY SHERMAN
Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St.
206-7100. Though Jan. 6.

BILL STEBER
Saba, 116 E. 16th St. 477-7722.
Through Dec. 1.

EDWARD STEICHEN
Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010.
Through Dec. 2.

EDWARD STEICHEN
Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. 966-6223.
Through Dec. 30.

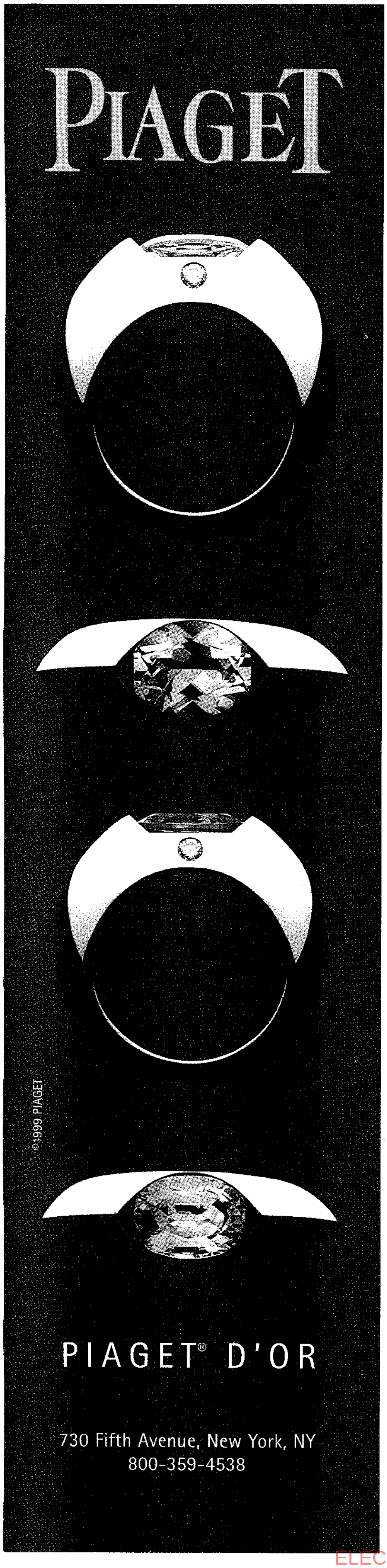
See the museum listings for a photography exhibition at the Whitney Museum.

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
"Die Zauberflöte," with Angela Maria Blasi, Mary Dunleavy, Michael Schade, and Gerald Finley; conducted by Sebastian Weigle. (Nov. 22 at 8.) ♦ With Esther Heideman replacing Ms. Blasi. (Nov. 27 at 8.) ♦ The season première of Wagner's **"Der Fliegende Holländer,"** with the Swedish soprano Nina Stemme (in her Met début, replacing an indisposed Sharon Sweet in the role of Senta), Roland Wagenführer (another début), James Morris, and Jan-Hendrik Rootering; Valery Gergiev. (Nov. 24 and Nov. 28 at 8.) ♦ The last performance this season of Puccini's **"Turandot,"** with Jane Eaglen, Hei-Kyung Hong, Dennis O'Neill, and Paul Plishka; Marco Armiliato. (Nov. 25 at 1.) ♦**"Der Rosenkavalier,"** with Cheryl Studer, Kristine Jepson, Elizabeth Norberg-Schultz, and Eric Halfvarson; Jiří Kout. (Nov. 25 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

AMATO OPERA COMPANY
The company completes its season run of Verdi's **"Il Trovatore,"** just in time to make way for the Met's forthcoming new production. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery. 228-8200. Nov. 24-25 at 7:30 and Nov. 26 at 2:30.)

FRED HO'S "WARRIOR SISTERS"
It's not every day that you run into a musician who joins a protean range of talents—as a composer, saxophonist, writer, and bandleader—with a commitment to Marxist ideology. Ho's "sheroic" opera (to a libretto by Ann T. Greene) combines the influences of Chinese opera, Asian martial arts, American jazz, and West African praise songs to tell the stories of four "womyn warriors" for social justice, mixed in with a healthy dose of left-wing agitprop. Performed by Ho's Afro Asian Music Ensemble. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 255-5793, ext. 11. Nov. 28-Dec. 2 at 8.)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ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
The American maestro Lorin Maazel concludes his two-week residency with four performances of Bruckner's Symphony No. 8 in C Minor, played without intermission. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Nov. 22 and Nov. 24-25 at 8 and Nov. 28 at 7:30.)

RUSSIAN CHAMBER CHORUS OF NEW YORK
Concerts of the devotional music of the Eastern Orthodox tradition remain a vital, if minor, part of the city's holiday events; the traditions of Catholic and Protestant musical forms (Masses, cantatas, motets) may have developed more dynamically over the centuries, but the best music of the Russian Church has a mystical sensibility that can be profoundly moving. The chorus, directed by Nikolai Kachanov, will present Alexander Gretchaninoff's "Liturgia Domestica"—a favorite of the legendary bass Fyodor Chaliapin—along with Russian songs by Igor Stravinsky and Zakhar Blyakher. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Nov. 25 at 2.)

MANHATTAN PHILHARMONIC
Peter Tiboris conducts Krommer's Concerto for Two Clarinets (with Stanley Drucker, the New York Philharmonic's principal clarinettist, and his wife, Naomi Drucker), Saint-Saëns's "La Muse et le Poète" (with the Philharmonic violinist Charles Rex and his brother, the cellist Christopher Rex), and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5 in E Minor. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Nov. 26 at 3.)

RECITALS

BARGEMUSIC
After two weeks in dry dock, the chamber-music series by the water continues with two sets of concerts coördinated by the cellist Fred Sherry. Nov. 23 and Nov. 25 at 7:30: A program of J. S. Bach, Purcell, Leclair, Vivaldi, and Telemann (the "Don Quixote" Suite). ♦ Nov. 24 at 7:30 and Nov. 26 at 4: Mozart's Quartet for Flute and Strings in D Major and Beethoven's Serenade in D Major for Flute, Violin, and Viola, along with more recent pieces by Elliott Carter and Charles Wuorinen. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061.)

JACK GIBBONS: "A CHOPIN SOIRÉE"
The English pianist presents a program reflective of the brilliant Paris salons of the eighteen-thirties and forties. Selections include music not only by Chopin but also by Liszt, Bellini, Alkan, Schumann, and Thalberg. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Nov. 24 at 8.)

THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER BAND
Composed on a dare from Frederick the Great of Prussia, in 1747, J. S. Bach's "Musical Offering" is a collection of contrapuntal tours de force for a little band of flute, two violins, keyboard, and continuo; the ensemble, led by harpsichordist Elaine Comparone, performs it in its entirety. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 932-9462. Nov. 26 at 2.)

HSIN-YUN HUANG
The New York Viola Society presents a concert by the Taiwanese violist, until recently a member of the Borromeo Quartet. The program is an homage to Brahms, even if three of the pieces—the two Sonatas of Op. 120 and the Trio in A Minor, Op. 114—were written for clarinet, with the viola as an optional substitute. But no matter, since the composer's Two Songs for Alto, Viola, and Piano, Op. 91, heartbreaking meditations on romantic and maternal love, prove beyond measure his affection for the instrument's sound. Ms. Huang will be assisted by the cellist Yeesun Kim, the pianist Thomas Sauer, and the mezzo-soprano Mary Nessinger. (Mannes College of Music, 150 W. 85th St. 924-7299. Nov. 26 at 4:30.)

WINDSCAPE
The woodwind quintet plays music by French composers at the Met's "Painters in Paris: 1895-1950" galleries. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Nov. 27 at 7.)

DANIEL BARENBOIM / RADU LUPU
The two pianists—each a highly individual keyboard personality—present a piano-duo program devoted to works by Schubert (including the Fantasie in F Minor), a master of the genre. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Nov. 27 at 7:30.) ♦ Mr. Barenboim offers a recital of his own the next day, featuring works by Liszt (three "Petrarch Sonnets" and the "Dante" Sonata, from the Second Year of "Années de Pèlerinage") and Albéniz. (Carnegie Hall. Nov. 28 at 7:30.)

FRIENDS & ENEMIES OF NEW MUSIC
Despite its goofy title, Friends & Enemies could be the prototypical New York new-music group: a bunch of composers (in this case, three) band together to present music by themselves, by certain valued senior colleagues, and sometimes by other people, too. This concert will be a "Four-Hand Pianothon" featuring music by Ben Yarmolinsky, David Del Tredici, Lois Vierk, Igor Stravinsky, and others, played by a squad of pianists that includes Kathy Supové and Anthony de Mare, both admired stalwarts of the new-music scene. (Greenwich House Music School, 46 Barrow St. Nov. 27 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

JU-YOUNG BAEK
The Korean violinist, the first-prize winner of the 2000 Young Concert Artists International Auditions, makes her New York début (with pianist David Riley) in music by Bartók, Brahms, Saraste, Webern, and John Corigliano (the Sonata for Violin and Piano). (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 307-6555. Nov. 28 at 8.)

SEYMOUR LIPKIN
The distinguished American pianist begins a series of recitals devoted to the sonatas of Schubert. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. Nov. 28 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"WALK OFF THE TURKEY"
For the past sixteen years a group of peripatetic New Yorkers have been hitting the pavement on the weekend following our nation's most gluttonous holiday. Led by Cy A Adler, the founder of a nonprofit environmental group called Shorewalkers, the hike traces a route along the Hudson River, starting from the Staten Island Ferry Building, at the tip of Manhattan, and ending eleven miles later at the Little Red Lighthouse, beneath the George Washington Bridge. The walk is held rain or shine, but if the weather turns nasty there are plenty of subway stops for quick escapes. A few of the folks on past walks have continued on past the Little Red Lighthouse. "Some go to the end of the island," Adler says. "Some go across the George Washington Bridge and walk home. They live in New Jersey." If you're feeling ambitious, it is possible to follow a path all the way to Bear Mountain, some fifty-six miles north. Adler can tell you the way: he's done it. (Nov. 25, starting at 9 A.M. For more information, call 330-7686.)

READINGS
Nov. 22 at 8: By the poets Dick Gallup and Hoa Nguyen. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door.) ♦ Nov. 28 at 8: By Stanley Kunitz, Robert Pinsky, and April Bernard, from their own poetry and from the work of poets who have inspired them. *New Yorker* poetry editor Alice Quinn is the evening's moderator. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799.)

TALKS
Nov. 26 at 7:30: The folksinger Jewel discusses her memoir, "Chasing Down the Dawn." (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.) ♦ Nov. 27 at 6:30: The musicologist David Hamilton offers an illustrated lecture, with audio clips, on Richard Strauss's opera "Salome." (Donnell Library Center, 20 W. 53rd St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Nov. 28 at 8: Joe Cuomo, the founding director of the Queens College Evening Readings series, interviews the playwright Edward Albee. (Music Building, Queens College, Flushing. 718-997-4646.)

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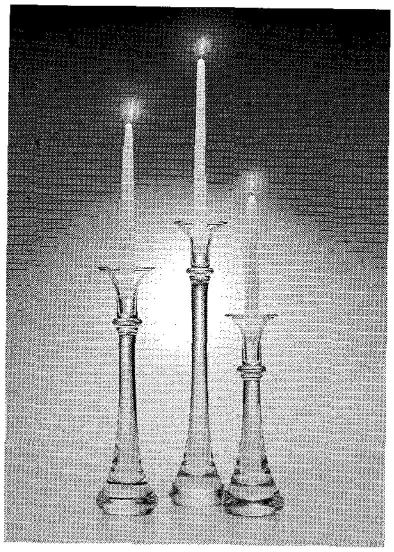

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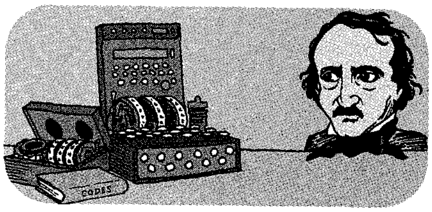
BOOK CURRENTS

Code Comfort

In 1841, Edgar Allan Poe, a longtime cryptography buff, introduced two coded texts in the pages of *Graham's Magazine*. Though the texts were ostensibly submitted by one W. B. Tyler, many now believe that they were composed by Poe himself. Poe never produced solutions for these brainteasers. Nor did anyone else, for a while: the first puzzle went unsolved until 1992, and the second until a few months ago, when a software engineer living in Toronto won twenty-five hundred dollars for cracking the code. William S. Butler and L. Douglas Keeney offer up a host of similar capers in the forthcoming **SECRET MESSAGES** (Simon & Schuster), a history of covert communication that includes the details of Benedict Arnold's Revolutionary War perfidy.



TONY MILLIONAIRE

Many of the best tales about codes and code breaking come out of military lore. In **BATTLE OF WITS** (Free Press), Stephen Budiansky draws on a million pages of recently declassified military intelligence to bolster his hefty cryptographic history of the Second World War. Budiansky, a Harvard-trained mathematician, blends high tech and human drama as he recounts, for example, how Lieutenant Commander Ian Fleming designed a 007-style mission to steal German code settings.

These days, we rely on encryption to keep digital eavesdroppers at bay as we chatter on cell phones and shop on-line. Unfortunately, as Winn Schwartau reveals in **CYBERSHOCK** (Thunder's Mouth), even the most advanced coding systems are vulnerable to hackers. Schwartau describes the havoc these techno-miscreants can wreak, from simple fraud to identity theft. The threat of these scenarios is enough to awaken the Luddite in anyone—even in Schwartau himself, who admits, "Yeah, I hate technology from time to time."

—*William Cohen*

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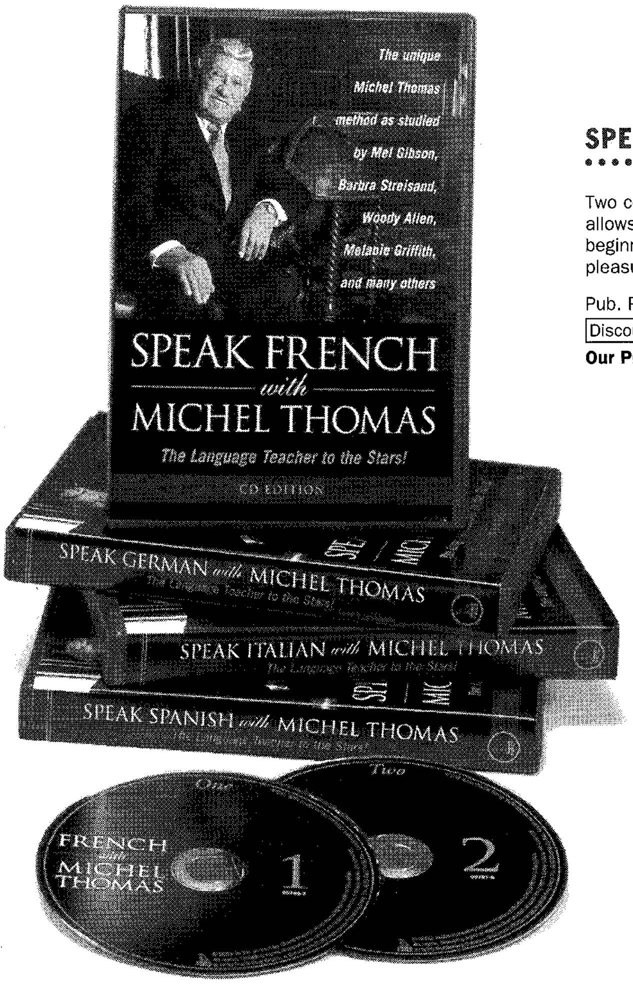
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MOVIES OPENING

102 DALMATIANS
As Cruella De Vil, Glenn Close continues her quest for a Dalmatian coat in this live-action sequel to the 1996 remake of the Disney classic. With Gérard Depardieu and Alice Evans. Directed by Kevin Lima. Opening Nov. 22.

MOONLIGHT WHISPERS
Two teen-agers meet in kendo class and then spiral into a sadomasochistic relationship, in this début film from Akihiko Shiota. In Japanese. Opening Nov. 22. (Cinema Village.)

QUILLS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Nov. 22.

THE TRENCH
The novelist William Boyd wrote and directed this drama about the Battle of the Somme, the worst defeat in the history of the British Army. Opening Nov. 22. (Film Forum.)

UNBREAKABLE
Bruce Willis and Samuel L. Jackson star in this supernatural thriller written and directed by M. Night Shyamalan ("The Sixth Sense"). Opening Nov. 22.

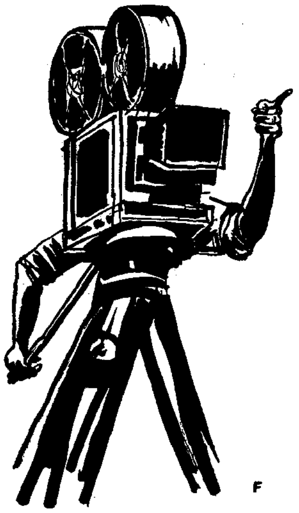
THE WEEKEND
In this drama directed by Brian Skeet, three friends gather in a country house to commemorate the death of a young man connected to all of them. With Deborah Kara Unger and James Duval. Opening Nov. 22.

FILM NOTES

ALMOST FAMOUS
Cameron Crowe's genial but remarkably undramatic account of his life and not very hard times as a fifteen-year-old rock critic in the early nineteen-seventies. Crowe's stand-in, William Miller (Patrick Fugit), leaves home against the wishes of his college-professor mom (Frances McDormand) when he accepts an assignment from *Rolling Stone* to cover a mid-level band called Stillwater. On the road, he falls into an intense admiration of the good-looking lead guitarist (Billy Crudup) and receives gentle treatment from a trio of groupies, the Band-Aids (led by Kate Hudson). Much of the movie plays easily and well as a record of good times, but there's no particular point to it.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 9/18/00.) (Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)

BEST IN SHOW
Christopher Guest reunites much of the cast of "Waiting for Guffman" for another mock documentary; the target this time around is the cloistered world of championship-dog breeding. Guest directs and scripts with a loose, improvisational style (no dialogue was written down), and while some of the scenes glide along with a quick-witted tempo, others are awkward. The dogs themselves are splendid, and when the satire works the laughs are plentiful. Best-in-group awards go to Parker Posey and Michael Hitchcock as an uptight suburban couple whose courtship involved adjacent Starbucks franchises, John Michael Higgins as a preening owner who outshines his shih tzu, and Fred Willard as a chipper commentator who showers asinine comments on the proceedings. If Guest has a trademark style, it's the airtight earnestness he demands of his cast—there's not one wink in the entire film.—*Michael Agger* (Angelika Film Center, Coronet Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and 19th Street East 6.)

BILLY ELLIOT
The British director Stephen Daldry has previously concentrated on theatre; now, as if to prove that he's a man for all art forms, he's made a film about ballet. Billy Elliot (Jamie Bell) is a slim, pugnacious boy who doesn't enjoy his boxing lessons but casts a jealous glance at the dance class that rehearses nearby. He joins in, prospers, gets some



private tuition from his careworn teacher (Julie Walters), and ends up auditioning for the Royal Ballet. Will he make it? Can you guess? Although the film is set during the miners' strike of 1984 (the most grievous strife in Britain's recent history), it slowly sheds its anger and abrasive comedy in favor of something softer. Billy's father (Gary Lewis) stops looking like a human pressure cooker and starts giving the boy encouraging hugs—a development we could do without. The best thing on view is Bell, whose ratty, unsentimental demeanor just about sees the story through.—*Anthony Lane* (10/30/00) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Cinema I, and Lincoln Square.)

BILLY LIAR
Touching, funny, and irritating, John Schlesinger's 1963 film is a portrait of a would-be artist as a weak young man. Tom Courtenay plays Billy, an undertaker's clerk in a city in northern England. Billy talks about becoming a novelist or a scriptwriter, but mostly he devotes himself to leading on two fiancées, lying about his family, and creating an imaginary country named Ambrosia. Courtenay conveys Billy's petty rebelliousness but fails to suggest any quality that would attract the many women in his life. Nonetheless, Schlesinger comes up with a classic snapshot of England as a country in need of youthful renewal, and he has just the actress to embody it in Julie Christie. As Billy's third gal, she's a free spirit who hopes in vain to take him to London. With a forceful stride and a relaxed emotional power in her face, she moves through the streets, swinging her handbag like a wrecking ball.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; Nov. 22-28.)

CHARLIE'S ANGELS
It's the usual story: hitch a couple of electrodes to an old TV show, flick the switch, and hope that it comes surging back to life. That plan more or less worked with the first "Mission: Impossible," but adaptations like "Lost in Space" just lay there on the slab. This latest effort can't be faulted for energy, but, in most other respects, it barely gives a twitch. The Angels are played by Lucy Liu, Drew Barrymore, and, most engagingly, Cameron Diaz; they are still controlled by the mysteriously dull Charlie, whose representative on earth is the waggish Bosley (an underused Bill Murray). The plot entails satellites, cell phones, and a threat to "world privacy"—not, one might suppose, a profound cause of anxiety for our flamboyant heroines. The director is someone, or something, called McG, and he, or it, seems content to bundle one high-kicking, high-volume scene on top of the next. You can't hear yourself think, which is probably a good thing.—*A.L.* (11/13/00) (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE CONTENDER
Vigorously unsubtle political entertainment. The Democratic President, Jackson Evans (Jeff Bridges), a wily, dominating fellow who may not be good at heart, nominates a woman, Senator Laine Hanson (Joan Allen), to be his Vice-President after the sitting Vice-President dies. A Republican congressman, Shelly Runyon (Gary Oldman), wants to block her. His weapon: some photographs of her participation, as a college freshman, in a frat-house orgy. When the Senator stands on her dignity, refusing to answer Runyon's questions, the movie becomes an attack on double standards—a noble conception but also a needlessly solemn one. The picture is juicily well acted, however, particularly by Oldman. Written and directed by Rod Lurie, who uses Washington unimaginatively, like a TV-movie director.—*D.D.* (10/16 & 10/23/00) (Battery Park 16, Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Union Square, and Waverly 1 and 2.)

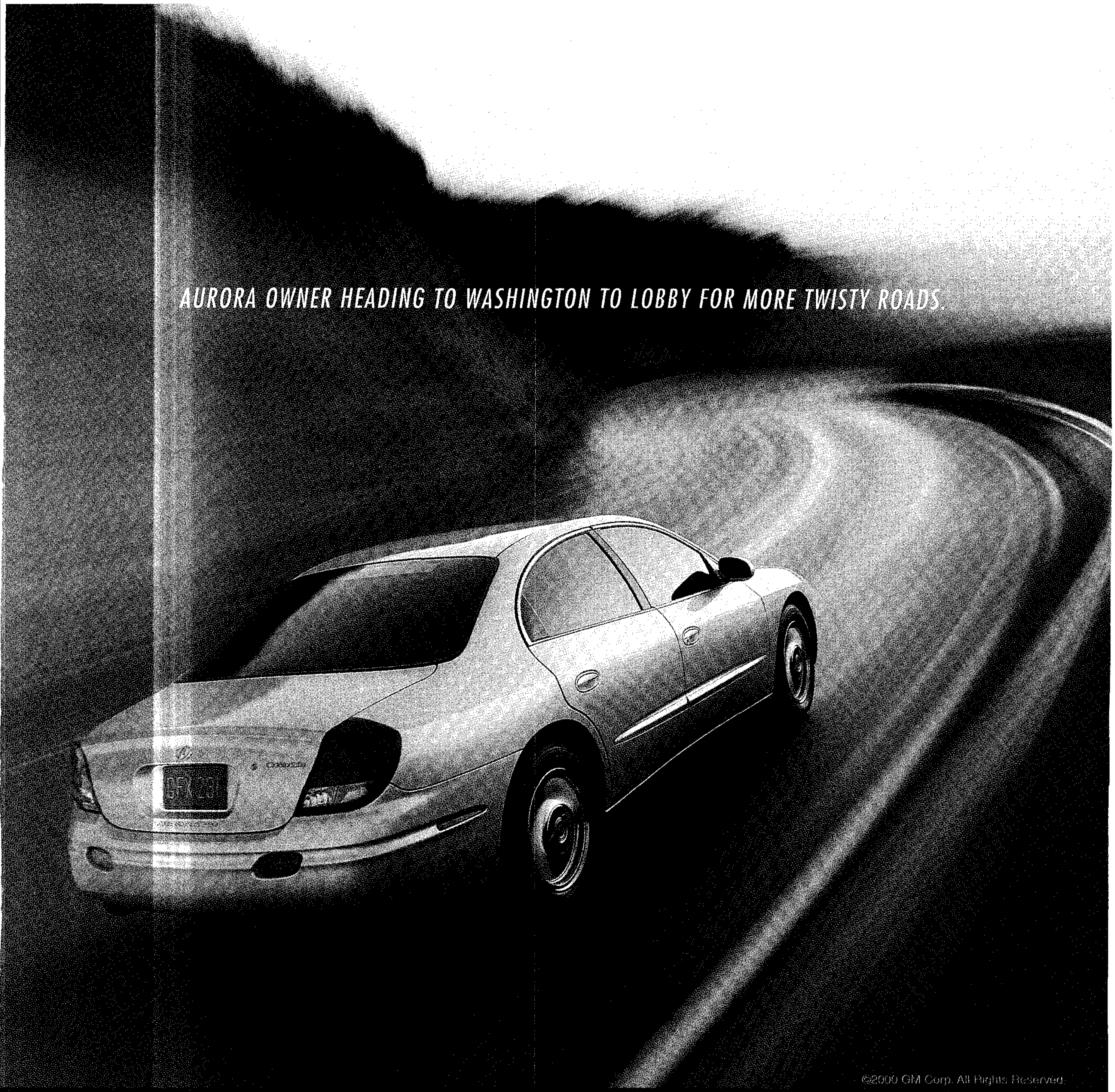
DANCER IN THE DARK
The new Lars Von Trier film makes his previous efforts seem like models of orthodoxy and restraint. Shot in Sweden, it's set in an America of Von Trier's own devising. Most of the characters speak with foreign accents, and the heroine—a timid, bespectacled factory worker and single mother named Selma—is played by Björk, the Icelandic pop munchkin. Selma has a congenital eye disease, and she is saving up to pay for an operation for her young son, who will otherwise follow her into blindness. The film is unashamedly two-toned, split between a granular authenticity and a stylized gaudiness. The musical scenes—in the factory, on a railroad track—have a deliberate, stamping awkwardness, overlaid with Björk's animal wailing. Many viewers have refused to stomach this unhealthy mixture, yet it feels laced with surprising power, and the harshness of the dénouement is unfeigned.—*A.L.* (9/25/00) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, State, and Union Square.)

GEORGE WASHINGTON
David Gordon Green's languid, painterly film about a group of African-American kids growing up in rural North Carolina has all the deliberate, poetic rambling of a Terrence Malick picture. Its "Days of Heaven"-like voice-over, spoken by the thirteen-year-old actress Candace Evanofski, gives the film a haunting, ethereal structure that's far removed from the gritty narratives typically found in stories of poverty and desperation. The script is both evocative and richly detailed, and when the film turns unexpectedly violent the difficulty of bearing truthful witness to the actions of others is movingly, and convincingly, portrayed.—*Bruce Diones* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and The Screening Room.)

THE GRINCH
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

JULES AND JIM
François Truffaut's celebration of bohemian life in France and Germany in the years of artistic ferment between the First World War and the Second. The Austrian, Jules (Oskar Werner), and the Frenchman, Jim (Henri Serre)—the sort of young artists who grow up into something else—have a peaceful friendship. But when they are with Catherine (Jeanne Moreau), they feel alive; anything may happen. She's the catalyst, the troublemaker, the source of despair as well as the source of joy. Elliptical, full of wit and radiance, this is the best movie ever made about what most of us think of as the Scott Fitzgerald period (though the film begins much earlier). Truffaut doesn't linger—nothing is held too long, nothing is overstated, or even stated. In French.—*Pauline Kael* (American Museum of the Moving Image; Nov. 25-26.)

THE LEGEND OF BAGGER VANCE
Robert Redford, directing in pastoral-elegy mode: the light is golden, the colors are blended, and drama is nowhere to be found. He's made a tall tale about golf in the early thirties, with Matt Damon as a Savannah athlete demoralized by the First World War and Will Smith as an angelic black caddie who emerges from the gloaming and restores Damon by whispering incomprehensible remarks in his ear about feeling his way to an "authentic stroke." With Charlize Theron around, Damon shouldn't have any trouble restoring him-



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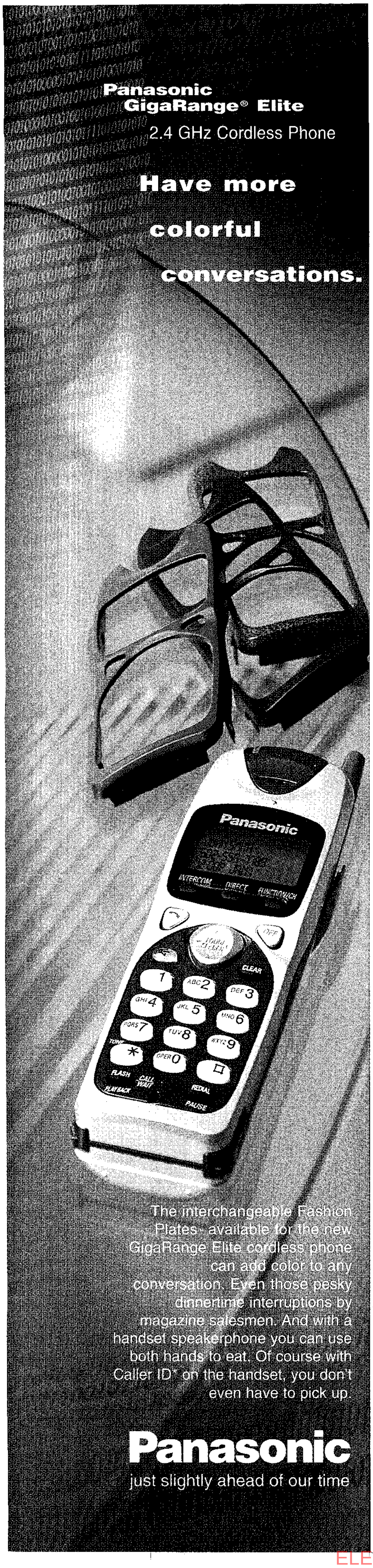

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he said brightly, "the flooring was removed to look for more termites, and we found dry rot, which would have gone undetected for who knows how long."

The timing proved propitious—just ahead of the arrival of a new team of shipwrights, from Spain this time, and from the same firm, as it happened, that had built the Santa María. The shipwrights dealt with the termite and dry-rot damage and completed their work on the other ships in the spring of 1998, on schedule and within budget. People connected to the Columbus Fleet Association were less thrilled to learn from the shipwrights that the collision damage to the Pinta and the Santa María could have been repaired just as easily in the water as in drydock. The shipyard plaza next to the museum, in other words, had been completely unnecessary.

In Corpus Christi one afternoon last month, I went to the Museum of Science and History for a look at the Pinta and the Santa María. A staff member unlocked a back door that led to the half-acre concrete plaza. Heavy metal cables secured both ships, in case a hurricane happened by, but nature had already taken its toll in other ways. The paint on the main decks was flaked, and there was obvious evidence of dry rot. Along the perimeter of the plaza, a riot of weeds and mesquite trees flourished. Life-size headless plywood cutouts of Columbus, King Ferdinand, and Queen Isabella were propped in front of the Santa María, patiently awaiting photo ops.

The ships and the plaza have been closed to the public since October of last year, when the board of the Columbus Fleet Association declared that it no longer had the funds to operate or maintain them. Under the circumstances, the board exercised what seemed its only logical option and sent a letter to the Spain-U.S.A. Foundation (a successor to Spain '92), inviting it to come get Las Carabelas.

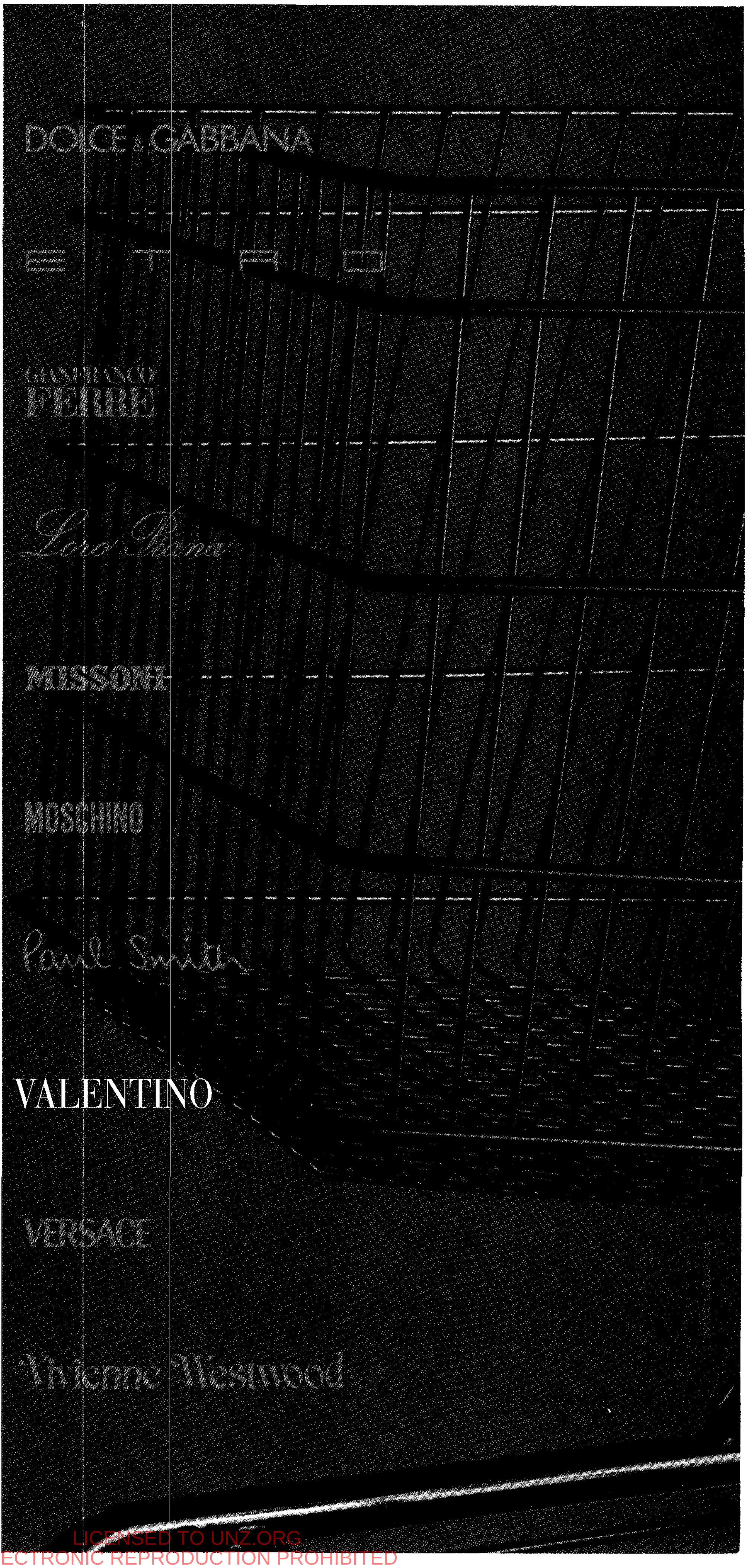
When that happened, Durrill responded in a manner both calculated and confounding. He bought the association's bank loan and also filed liens against the ships—maneuvers that put him in the position of being both the principal benefactor and the principal creditor of the association. Spain, naturally, would be more than happy to reclaim the ships. But Durrill, who has resigned from the association, stands in its way. Picking a fight with Spain hasn't exactly enhanced Durrill's reputation in his home town, especially among a lot of Hispanics. The wounded feelings exposed by this debacle, it seems, are less rooted in the conflict between Spain and a citizen of Corpus Christi than in Corpus Christi's conflicts with itself. In such situations, the impulse always exists to point a finger of blame, and Durrill has set himself up as the most logical target.

"Dusty, I think, is well-meaning," a Hispanic leader told me. "But, unfortunately, because he's put up all the money he wants to call all the shots, and that turns off a lot of folks on my side of town. All those things he's built and paid for around here—in the final analysis, they constitute monuments to Dusty Durrill. We don't need a *patron*—we watched all those movies, and those days are gone."

Durrill, meanwhile, says he has a debt-reorganization plan that could work. In print, he declines to get too specific about the details, fearing that it will undermine his tactics against Spain, but he's convinced there's a way not only to keep Las Carabelas in Corpus Christi but to get all three ships back in the water.

"We got some stubbed toes and bruised knees," he said the other day, "but we can still tell the story of the Spanish discovery of the New World right here in Corpus Christi, and we should. The Big Kahuna—Spain—is up there hollering, posturing, unable or unwilling to address the debt on my note. As it is, I'm stuck with that debt. And I'm saying is it better to be stuck with it with the ships still here or with the ships gone? I'll tell you my position. My position is that, legally, Spain's position doesn't hold water."

On my last day in Corpus Christi, I stopped at a city-owned marina—situated equidistant from a pair of Durrill Foundation miradors—and parked next to the Niña, which I recognized because it was the only three-masted fifteenth-century-replica sailing vessel in the neighborhood. Except for a couple of small Spanish flags, mounted on the stern and port aft railings, it seemed anonymous and forlorn. A "No Trespassing" sign hung over the port gunwale. The ropes for the mast rigging were in place, and the ship's dark, weathered, unvarnished exterior conveyed a solid impression of seaworthiness. But it hadn't been sailed for over half a year, and it wasn't going anywhere soon. ♦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self through love, but the movie is too dreamy and silly for sex. Again and again, the camera takes the point of view of a golf ball on simulated flights through the air. The ball lands with a thunk—and so does the movie.—*D.D.* (11/6/00) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

LOVES OF A BLONDE

A dreamily romantic young girl who is depressed and lost in her regimented factory milieu mistakes the casual interest of a young musician for a serious interest, and follows him to his home. This 1965 Milos Forman picture is a comedy, and yet it's too painful and desolate to be funny; it reveals a horribly petty middle-class world within the Socialist economy. In Czech.—*P.K.* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Nov. 26.)

ME & ISAAC NEWTON

Michael Apted's subtly rewarding documentary about seven remarkable scientists, who talk about their beginnings and their myriad discoveries. The group includes a chemist, two physicists, a cognitive scientist, a computer scientist, a cancer researcher, and a primatologist, and their warm, accessible manners make their accomplishments seem all the more inspiring. Apted travels to his subjects' natural surroundings, catching them at home, in a rain forest, or in an impoverished village, and then lets the camera do the work of discovering their motivations. He's an unobtrusive director (a skill he honed while working on his acclaimed "7-Up" series), and his eclectic intelligence brings out the boundless curiosity that drives these intrepid thinkers.—*B.D.* (Cinema Village.)

MEET THE PARENTS

Jay Roach moves on from the campy delights of the Austin Powers series to direct this smoothly acted comedy of errors. Ben Stiller plays a modern man charged with a Victorian task: asking his girlfriend's father for permission to marry his daughter. With a calamitous surname ("pronounced just like it's spelled, F-O-C-K-E-R") and a faintly hilarious profession (male nurse), Stiller seems like a sitting duck for the secretive, overprotective father, played by Robert De Niro. Stiller grovels, De Niro growls, and the girls (Blythe Danner and Teri Polo) watch from the sidelines. This is dumbed-up comedy: there are just enough unexpected moments to redeem all the easy pleasures of the slapstick.—*M.A.* (Battery Park 16, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

MEN OF HONOR

Robert De Niro's bizarre performance as a choleric Navy diver—spasmodic body movement and an out-of-the-swamp Southern accent—is the only real life in this exceptionally square military biography. An earnest Cuba Gooding, Jr., plays the real-life hero Carl Brashear, who overcame racist hazing to become the Navy's first black master diver in the nineteen-fifties. De Niro is the instructor who initially tries to discourage Brashear and then becomes his champion. Familiar as it may be, the story has stirring moments, although the screenwriter, Scott Marshall Smith, and the director, George Tillman, Jr., do their best to kill them. Each scene shows the hero facing some Challenge, which he sternly Confronts and then Overcomes.—*D.D.* (11/20/00) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, Empire 25, Murray Hill Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, Village East Cinemas, and Ziegfeld.)

ONE DAY IN SEPTEMBER

A skillful, unnerving documentary that re-creates the massacre of eleven Israeli athletes by Palestinian terrorists at the 1972 Munich Olympics. Even today, the ironies are painful to contemplate. The Germans, eager to dispel remaining doubts about the peaceable character of the "New Germany," kept security guards away from the Olympic Village and tried to persuade the Palestinians that the killing of Jews on German soil should not happen again. Later, at an airport near Munich, the local police performed with an ineptitude almost hard to believe. The movie, which is narrated by Michael Douglas, consists of period television footage, a few staged episodes, and interviews with participants, including the sole surviving terrorist and some very sheepish German officials. The massacre is not given sufficient historical context, but as a moment-by-moment report of a horrifying event the movie is both instructive and deeply upsetting. Directed by Kevin Macdonald. Produced by Arthur Cohn.—*D.D.* (Film Forum.)

PAY IT FORWARD

An embarrassingly ham-handed fable about doing good deeds, but worth seeing for Helen Hunt's first-rate performance as an alcoholic Las Vegas cocktail waitress and single mother—a woman with lousy judgment who wants to do the right thing but doesn't know how. As a classroom exercise, her son Trevor (Haley Joel Osment) devises the scheme of "pay it forward"—performing a gratuitous act of kindness for three people and then insisting that they do the same for three others. Trevor helps strangers, but, playing Cupid, he's more eager to help his mother meet his teacher (Kevin Spacey). It's a rum role for Spacey, who sacrifices his aura of malevolence by delivering an unconvincing, weepy confession fit for a TV movie. Written by Leslie Dixon, from Catherine Ryan Hyde's novel, and directed by Mimi Leder.—*D.D.* (11/6/00) (Battery Park 16, Coronet Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, Village East Cinemas, and Village Theatre VII.)

RED PLANET

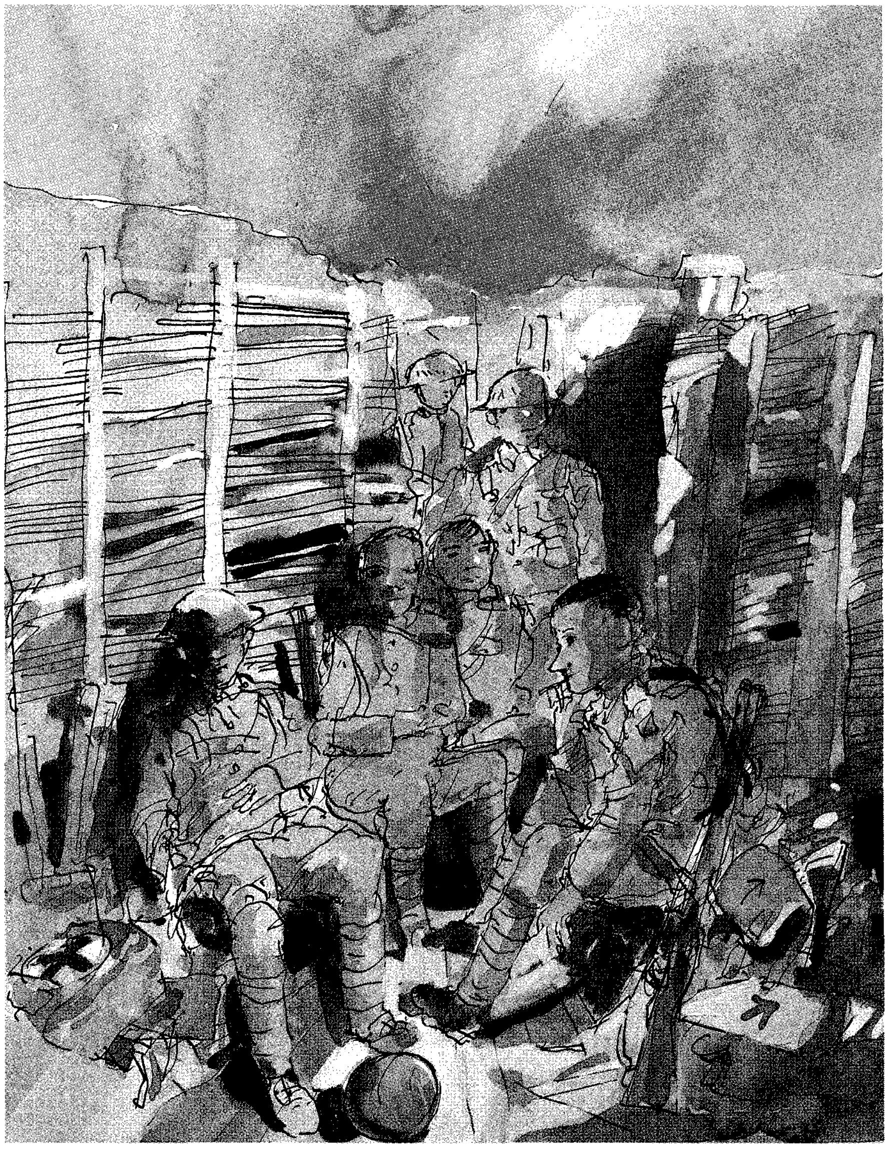
So much for space as the final frontier. In the second voyage to Mars launched by Hollywood this year, Val Kilmer and an indistinguishable cast of others wander around the deserts of Jordan—sorry, Mars—in an attempt to walk off a nasty case of déjà vu. Less witty than "Mission to Mars," the film leans heavily on space-movie clichés, but, happily, the token crew member who pontificates about the space-time continuum gets knocked off first.—*M.A.* (Astor Plaza, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

REQUIEM FOR A DREAM

Darren Aronofsky's new film stars Ellen Burstyn as Sara Goldfarb, a Brighton Beach widow who launches herself on a crash diet—a path that will lead to pill addiction and electroshock therapy. Meanwhile, her son Harry (Jared Leto) and his girlfriend, Marion (Jennifer Connelly), yield to the pull of hard drugs. Aronofsky divides them by split screen, and punches home their addictions with a blistering montage of pills, puffs, and dilating eyes. All this is managed with formidable skill, but it shuts the movie down, and the various junkies—even Burstyn, who gives the role everything she's got—end up looking less substantial than their respective poisons.—*A.L.* (10/9/00) (Union Square.)

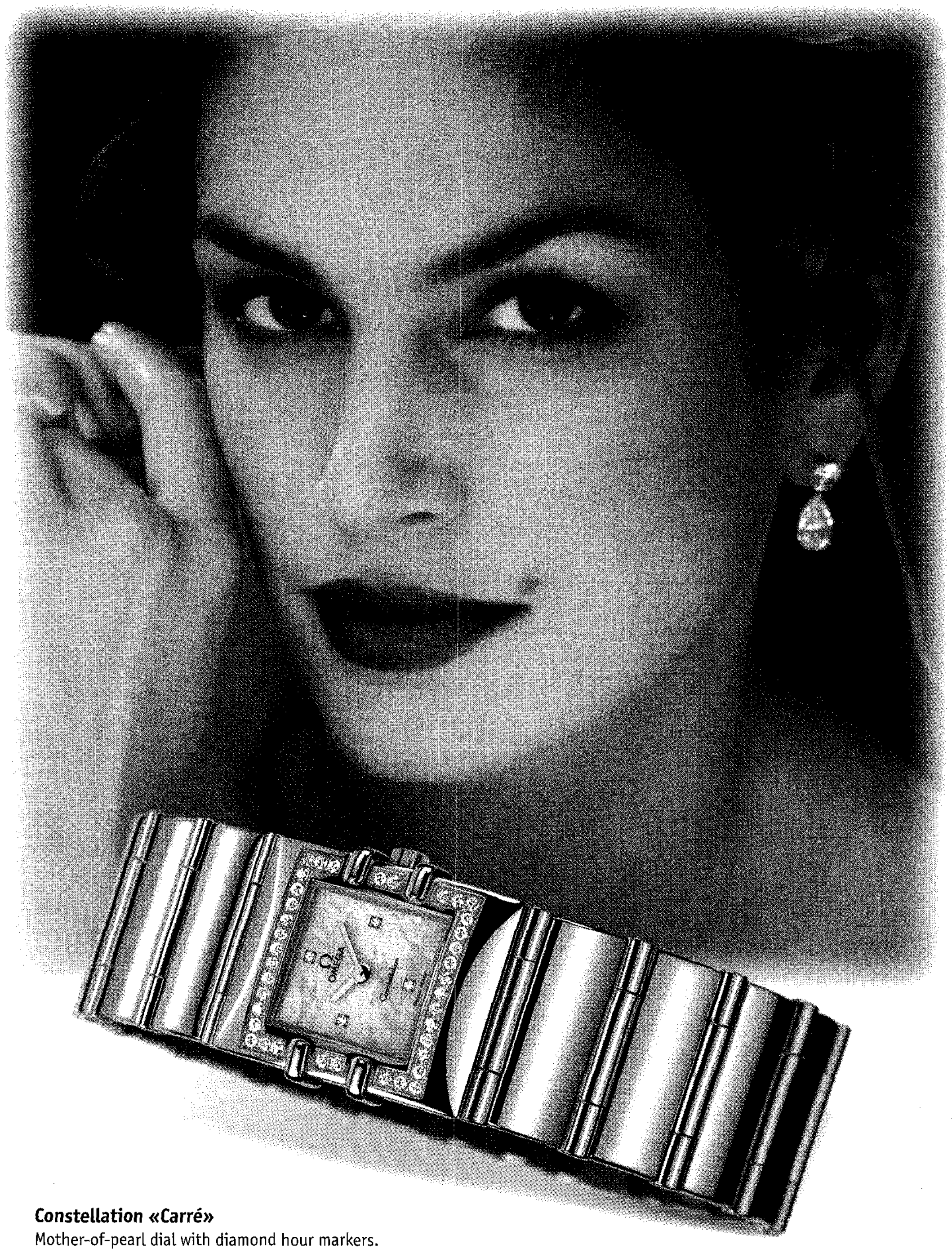
THE 6TH DAY

Arnold Schwarzenegger gets cloned by a criminal corporation headed by a svelte entrepreneur (Tony Goldwyn) who wears silver-gray clothes and fashionable tiny glasses. The main interest of this science-



British soldiers prepare for the Battle of the Somme in William Boyd's "The Trench."

ROBERT ANDREW PARKER



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fiction thriller is the design of its near-future setting—close enough to us that the technology is no more than an eerie extension of current manias. There is a virtual girlfriend who offers sex the minute her partner comes home and a doll, in the form of a complaining little girl, who is disturbingly human. The point seems to be that technology is erasing the difference between the human and the nonhuman and no one much cares. The writers, Cormac and Marianne Wibberly, and the director, Roger Spottiswoode, should have trusted this provocative idea and gone further with it. Instead, the film falls back on conventional elements: car chases, shoot-outs, and the like.—*D.D.* (11/20/00) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Park & 86th Street Cinemas.)

VENUS BEAUTY INSTITUTE

A melancholy portrait of a perversely lonely Parisian single woman (Nathalie Baye) who picks up men at will but revolts when a raffishly handsome sculptor (Samuel Le Bihan) falls in love with her. Filmed in the luscious, synthetic blue-and-pink hues of the beauty parlor in which the heroine works, the picture offers a nonjudgmental view of women's obsessions and of sexual temperaments in all their variety. Unfortunately, it loses drive and focus near the end and slips away—it's half of a very good movie. Bulle Ogier plays the proprietor of the beauty shop; Tonie Marshall wrote and directed.—*D.D.* (59th Street East Cinema and Quad Cinema.)

THE YARDS

A lowering, heavy-browed thriller from the director James Gray, who made a name for himself with "Little Odessa." In many ways, this is more of the same: a tight and sometimes tortured community, the sober settling of scores, and what feels like an official rationing of daylight. Mark Wahlberg plays Leo, who's trying to go straight; he takes a job as sidekick to his old friend Willie (Joaquin Phoenix), who fixes contracts for the New York subway system. Things go well, then badly, then worse still, until Leo is dwelling in subterranean solitude—Gray's kind of place. The supporting cast is tough and tested: Faye Dunaway, Ellen Burstyn, and especially James Caan, who plays Leo's uncle by marriage. The film may be humorless, unflustered by the need to quicken or amuse, but it feels unfashionably true to itself. Gray has reconstructed a world that he knows, and conjured a mood that no one else would have the nerve to maintain. For good measure, he also stages a great street fight. With Charlize Theron as Willie's despairing girl.—*A.L.* (10/30/00) (Angelika Film Center and Cinema 3rd Avenue.)

YOU CAN COUNT ON ME

The first-rate actress Laura Linney—bland on the surface but with angry impulses churning underneath—gives a detailed and involving performance as a single working mother in a small and somewhat boring upstate New York town. When her screwup of a kid brother (Mark Ruffalo) returns from Alaska, she's torn between tossing him out and letting him stay on and become a companion to her fatherless son (Rory Culkin). The movie was written and directed by the playwright and screenwriter Kenneth Lonergan, who pays close attention to the way so many of us are divided between good and bad impulses—including bad impulses we desperately need to act on if we're not going to feel half-dead. Lonergan's work is quiet but intense, and Ruffalo—dark and sensual and agonizingly confused—gives a heartbreaking performance. With Matthew Broderick and Jon Tenney as Linney's suitors.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Lincoln Square.)

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LA BÛCHE
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CALLE 54
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

DR. T AND THE WOMEN (10/16 & 10/23/00)
Empire 25 and Village East Cinemas.

KIPPUR
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.

LITTLE NICKY
Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema II, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.

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Lincoln Square, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770).
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St. (945-3418).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
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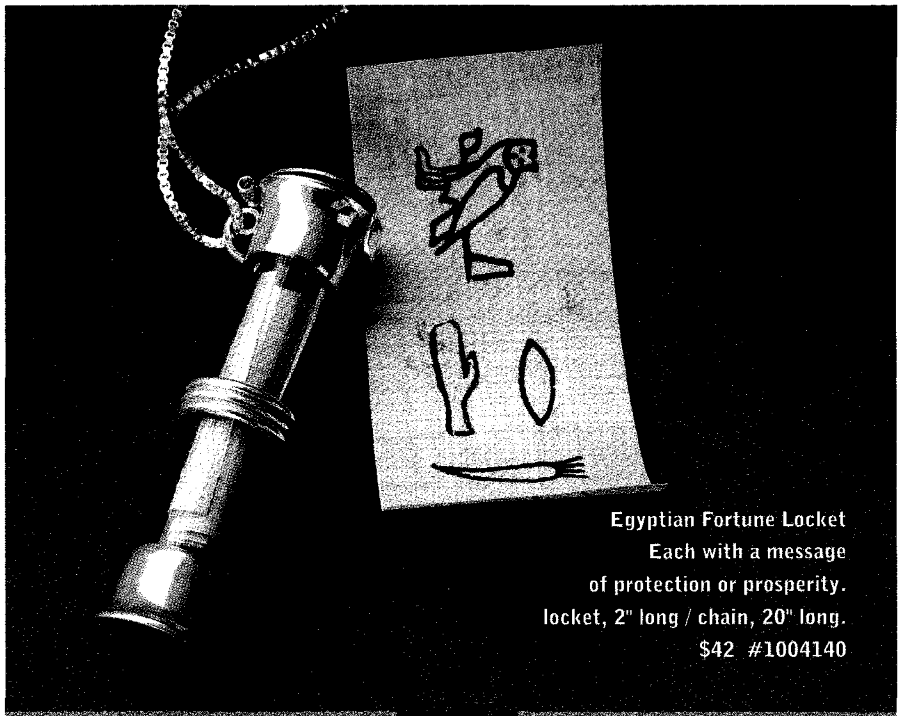

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REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Dec. 3: "Visions of New York: Films from the 1960's Underground." Nov. 25 at 2: Films by George and Mike Kuchar. ♦ Nov. 25 at 4:30: Films by Robert Downey and Paul Bartel. ♦ Nov. 26 at 2: "Guns of the Trees" (1962, Jonas Mekas). ♦ Nov. 26 at 4:30: "Wavelength" (1967, Michael Snow) and "Zorn's Lemma" (1970, Hollis Frampton). ♦ Classic movies. Nov. 25-26 at 6:30: "Jules and Jim" (†).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—Nov. 24-30: The Eighth Annual African Diaspora Film Festival.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770)—Nov. 22-23 at 7: "Lawrence of Arabia" (1962, David Lean). ♦ Nov. 24 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "The Shop on Main Street" (1965, Ján Kadár; in Slovak). ♦ Nov. 25 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Closely Watched Trains" (1966, Jiri Menzel; in Czech). ♦ Nov. 26 at 2, 4:30, 7:20, and 9:10: "Loves of a Blonde" (†). ♦ Nov. 27 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Muriel" (1963, Alain Resnais; in French). ♦ Nov. 28 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Arthur" (1981, Steve Gordon).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through Nov. 30, at 1:30, 3:40, 5:50, 7:50, and 9:50: "Billy Liar" (†).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through Jan. 2: A Luis Buñuel centennial retrospective. Nov. 24 at 6:30 and Nov. 26 at 2: "Land Without Bread" (1933, Buñuel) and "España 1937" (1937; Buñuel; in Spanish). ♦ Nov. 24 at 8 and Nov. 25 at 2: "Guard, Alert!" (1936, Jean Grémillon and Buñuel; in Spanish). ♦ Nov. 25 at 5 and Nov. 28 at 2:30: "The Bitter Mr. Quintin" (1935, Buñuel; in Spanish). ♦ Nov. 26 at 5 and Nov. 27 at 2:30: "La Hija de Juan Simón" (1935, Nemesio M. Sobrevila, Eduardo Ugarte, José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, and Buñuel; in Spanish).

THE SCREENING ROOM
54 Varick St. (334-2100)—Classic Hong Kong action films. Nov. 24-25 at midnight: "Zu: Warriors from the Magic Mountain" (1983, Tsui Hark; in Cantonese). ♦ Nov. 25-26 at 1: "South" (1919, Frank Hurley).

SYMPHONY SPACE
2537 Broadway, at 95th St. (864-5400)—Through Nov. 28: "Empires of Passion: The Cinema of Obsession." Nov. 28 at 7: "Empire of Passion" (1978, Nagisa Oshima; in Japanese). ♦ Nov. 28 at 9:15: "Last Tango in Paris" (1972, Bernardo Bertolucci).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through Nov. 30: "Soviet Cinema of the Sixties and Seventies." All films are in Russian. Nov. 22 at 1, 5, and 9: "Pirosmani" (1968, Georgy Shagelaya). ♦ Nov. 22 at 2:45 and 6:45: "July Rain" (1966, Marlen Khutsiev). ♦ Nov. 23 at 1: "Hamlet" (1964, Grigory Kozintsev). ♦ Nov. 23 at 3:45 and 10: "Sayat Nova" (1969, Sergei Paradjanov). ♦ Nov. 23 at 5:30, Nov. 25 at 4, and Nov. 28 at 3: "Goodbye, Boys" (1964, Mikhail Kalik). ♦ Nov. 23 at 8: "The First Teacher" (1965, Andrei Konchalovsky). ♦ Nov. 26 at 6:15 and Nov. 28 at 1: "Début" (1970, Gleb Panfilov). ♦ Nov. 26 at 8:15: "No Ford in the Fire" (1967, Panfilov). ♦ Silent films, accompanied by a live orchestra. Nov. 24 at 8: "Foolish Wives" (1922, Erich von Stroheim). ♦ Movies for children. Nov. 25 at 2: "The Incredible Mr. Limpet" (1964, Arthur Lubin).

THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

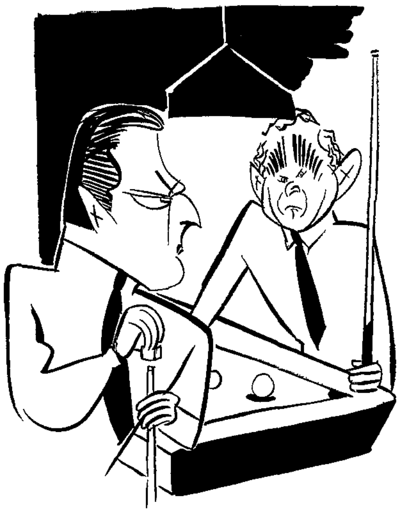
COMMENT
GAME PLANS

"The loser now will be later to win," Bob Dylan once pointed out, and, as is so often the case with Dylan, though the syntax is surprising the wisdom is timeless. The lesson concealed inside what has otherwise been a civics course from hell, the lengthy and florid (*c'est le mot juste*) closing chapter of this year's Presidential election, is that victory is not always the best outcome in life. Winning is overrated, and the reason is that there is always another way to get what you want. There are many paths upward.

The battle for Florida is sometimes compared to the endgame of a chess match, in which Al Gore, left with only two knights and a passed Christopher, tries to evade capture by a Bush team that seems made up entirely of rooks. Somehow the analogy feels off. To begin with, chess matches don't have cheerleaders. For people who thought the purpose of an education was to make one humble before the ambiguities of life, there is a terrible fascination in the televised spectacle, night after night, of an apparently endless stream of talking hotheads, from James Baker to Alan Dershowitz, bellowing out partial and predictable "analyses" of the legal and political issues in dispute. Their partisanship is so effortless; it leaps over every contradiction. After a campaign that seemed incapable of polarizing anybody, people now appear ready to go to war over the correct interpretation of a dimpled chad. (Conservative in most matters, Republicans unexpectedly find themselves in the "postmodernist" position of arguing that, since all interpretation is subjective, the meaning must be indeterminate.)

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

Another reason the chess analogy seems misplaced is that, as many people have pointed out, the deeper purpose of the legal and rhetorical maneuvering in Florida is to lay the ground for the next election. Florida is in the strange position of being both the last battleground in the Presidential race of 2000 and the first battleground in the Presidential race of 2004. Of course, it is better to have power than not to have power, and the winner will have four years to undo the damage—the suspicion that political muscle had more to do with the outcome than the voters did—that will almost certainly accompany a victory, particularly if it is clinched in a courtroom. But at the moment losing Florida in the right way almost seems to be worth more than winning it in the wrong way. Gore's principal goal, should he end up losing, is to increase the amount of pain attached to winning. Each candidate wants to make it seem as though the other guy is the obstructionist, on the theory that, as Dylan, again, so presciently and agrammatically put it, "he that gets hurt will be he who has stalled."



Al Gore and George W. Bush

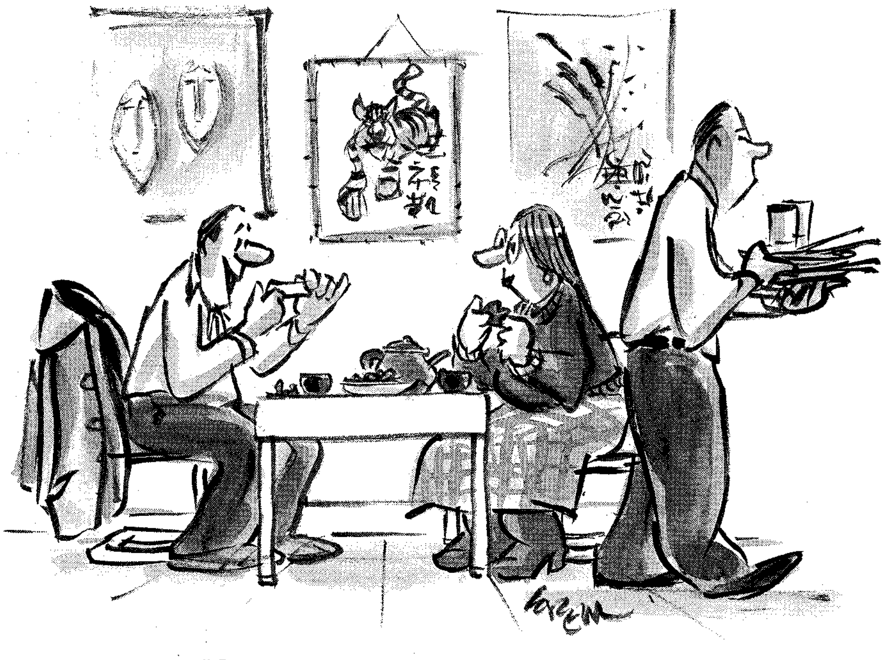
Willie Mays used to strike out deliberately early in a game, so that later, facing the same pitcher with men on base, he would be sure to get the pitch his opponent mistakenly believed he couldn't hit. A better analogy is probably to a money sport, like pool—for example, the games Paul Newman and Tom Cruise play in Martin Scorsese's "The Color of Money." The idea of the movie is that you can never know who the best pool player is, because players are always deliberately losing one game in order to raise the stakes in the next. The virtue these examples teach is not deception but patience.

Americans are rarely patient with anything less than what they have been made to understand is the ultimate prize. We are socialized to think that there is no value in losing—to believe, as Vince

Lombardi is eternally quoted as saying, that "winning isn't everything. It's the only thing." But every prize has the potential of turning into a booby prize. Even before the Florida stand-off, people were wondering about the desirability of occupying the White House during an economic slowdown and with an almost equally divided Congress. Bush the Lesser, should he end a winner, might contemplate the fate of Bush the Greater—a contrast loser forced to compete with the memory of a charismatic communicator associated with prosperity. When you cannot govern, you discredit the politics you represent. Jimmy Carter is the admonitory example. And every defeat can be used to raise the value of a victory down the road. Both Ronald Reagan and the kind of conservatism he stood for were stronger in 1980 for having lost in the Republican primaries in 1976—just as Bill Clinton and Al Gore rose from the ashes of the man who beat Gore in the Democratic primaries in 1988, Michael Dukakis.

In fact, Vince Lombardi never uttered the famous slogan attributed to him; it was spoken by one Henry (Red) Sanders, the coach of the 1955 U.C.L.A. football team. What Lombardi actually said was "Winning isn't everything, but wanting to win is." It doesn't make as good a sound bite, but it's a lot closer to the right idea.

—*Louis Menand*



"Good Lord! It's another vote for Al Gore!"

LETTER FROM AUSTIN
BUSHED IN TEXAS

I landed in Austin, Texas, the Friday evening after the election, and took a cab straight to one of the new downtown hotels, where a black-tie dinner for contributors to the Texas Book Festival was taking place. Laura Bush was the festival's honorary chairman, and a small subset of the dinner guests had had the evening's really hot ticket: an invitation to a pre-dinner cocktail hour at the Governor's Mansion. At the dinner, the people who hadn't been to the cocktail hour pumped those who had for details.

Escorted by Texas law-enforcement officers through a press stakeout, the cocktail-party guests had found themselves in a room in which George W. Bush and Dick Cheney suddenly materialized. Cheney was wearing a suit and tie but hadn't shaved; Bush had a boil on the side of his face, covered by a Band-Aid. The hand count of votes in Palm Beach County was imminent, and Bush said that he was sure he would lose it. "You're watching an election being stolen!" one person reported him as saying.

But Bush was not despondent, and he certainly hadn't given up. He told people that he would appoint several Democrats to his Cabinet, if he got the chance. He also hadn't lost his old life-of-the-party quality, the one he has learned not to display in public. There was the usual complement of Bush hand-pumping, arm-draping, shit-giving, nickname-calling, and head-locking.

After a while, Bush and Cheney left for the Bush ranch, in Crawford, a hundred miles north of Austin, and Laura Bush headed for the black-tie dinner, where she was to give a speech. She was calm, friendly, confident, and funny, making jokes about recounts and lock-boxes, and calling the book festival "an event whose outcome is *never* in doubt."

Mrs. Bush's remarks had been written by Stephen Harrigan, the author of "The Gates of the Alamo." Later, Harrigan himself got up to read from his book. He began by recalling an incident from the summer of 1999, when Bush skipped a Republican event in California to attend the Ryder Cup golf championship, at the Country Club in Brookline, Massachusetts. The press took this decision as proof that Bush was lazy and arrogant, but it turned out that Ben Crenshaw, the captain of the Ryder Cup team and one of Bush's professional-sports hero-buddies from Texas, had asked him to address the American golfers—who had fallen far behind—on the eve of their final round. Bush read aloud to them one of the last letters written by William Barret Travis, the commander of the Texas troops at the Alamo, shortly before they were killed. This is a sacred text in Texas, and everyone who grew up there can recite at least the most famous parts from memory: "Never surrender!" "Victory or death!" Sure enough, the Ryder Cup team staged a comeback and won.

The next morning, I walked around downtown. The Governor's departure and the onset of the hand count made for a strangely calm atmosphere in Austin. The structures that had been erected for a huge Tuesday-night victory party had been pulled down. The press had moved on to Crawford or Tallahassee or Palm Beach, leaving behind just a handful of bored-looking sentries outside the Governor's Mansion and the Bush campaign headquarters. Bushies bearing secrets could be seen here and there: Karl Rove

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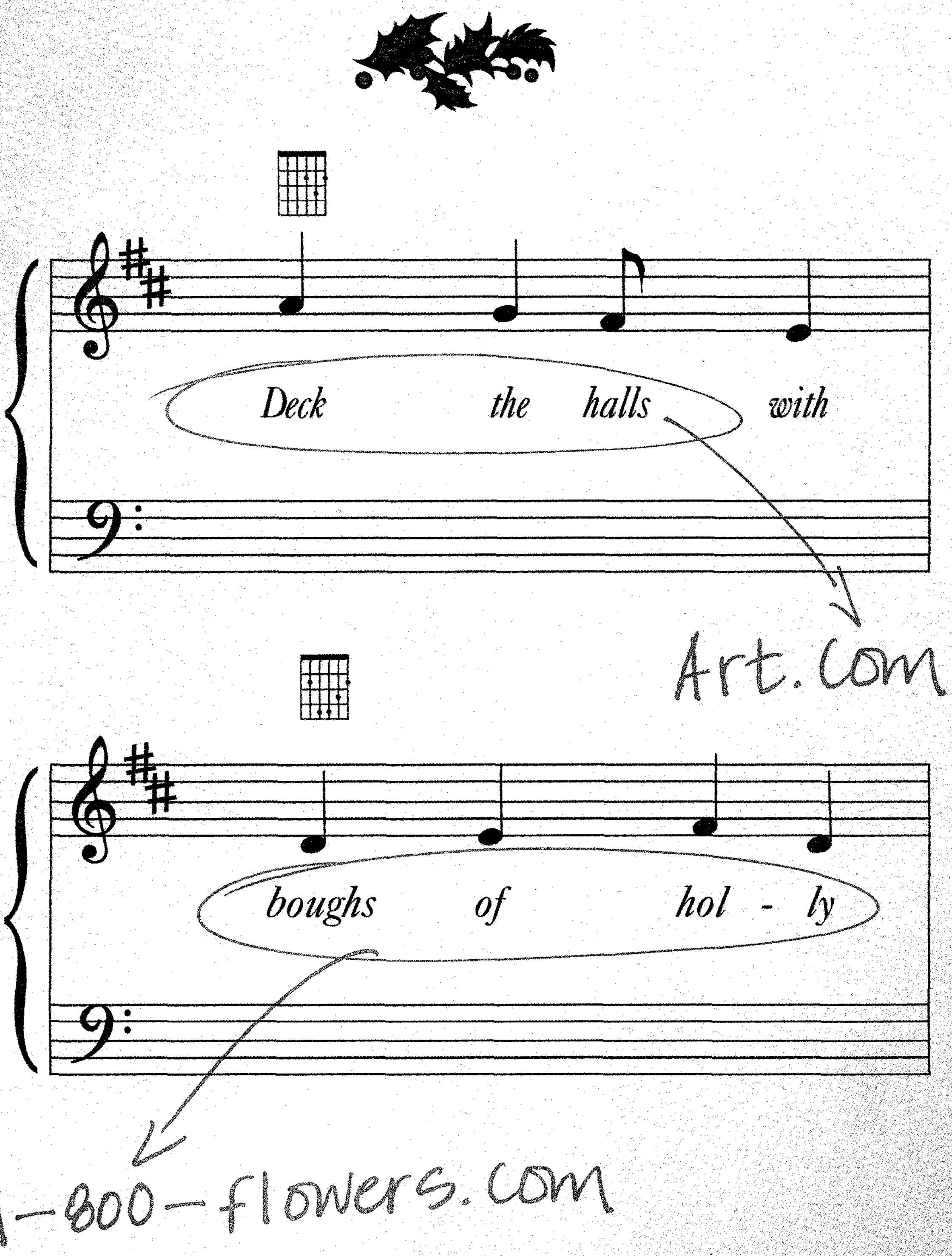

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on a pay phone; Karen Hughes, looking exhausted, wandering into Las Manitas café for a takeout coffee. There was a brief confrontation outside the state Capitol between Bush and Gore supporters, and they were separated by a very large group of Texas lawmen. By Sunday, the demonstrators had disappeared. The usual crowd of schoolchildren, veterans, and tourists wandered in and out of the Capitol. A bride had her picture taken inside the rotunda.

The calm was unsettling rather than reassuring. Every conversation, of course, was about the election, but life seemed to be going blithely along. It would have felt better if Austin had been palpably on edge about the prospect of our not having a functional federal government. Instead, twenty years of hearing government declared to be superfluous seemed to have engendered an indifference to its future, as if, in the event things didn't work out, the states or private business could run the country. In that sense, the worries that Bush expressed at the cocktail party were misplaced. He might lose the election, but cosmically he had already won. Regardless of who is the next President, Washington will not be trying to accomplish anything very ambitious. And that is what Bush has been promising all along.

—*Nicholas Lemann*

MIAMI POSTCARD
AS NASTY AS THEY GOTTA BE

It may be a little early to identify a poet laureate of the swinging-chad era, but a Florida lawyer named Bruce Rogow made a strong claim last week. Rogow (rhymes with "Pogo") represents the Palm Beach County supervisor of elections, Theresa LePore, who is responsible for the confusing butterfly ballot design in that electorally embattled county. On Monday, in Miami federal court, Rogow faced off with some of the best-known lawyers in the country; his adversaries included Theodore Olson, the smooth Washington operator, who represented George W. Bush, and his allies included Laurence Tribe, the Harvard law professor and liberal icon, who spoke for the Democrats. But, under the brass chandeliers of the hushed central courtroom, Rogow stole the show.

Rogow is sixty and lanky, with a build and a beard that recall Abe Lincoln. Like most Americans early last week, Judge Donald Middlebrooks wanted to know about those now famous little cardboard squares in the county's ballot, and he asked Rogow how the Palm Beach authorities decided whether a bulging chad counted as a vote. "Pregnancy does not count in Palm Beach," Rogow answered, in the vote-counting vernacular. "Only penetration counts in Palm Beach."

Rogow has been on the faculty of Nova Southeastern University's law school since 1974. He has also cultivated an eclectic private law practice, which has included eleven arguments before the United States Supreme Court. Until last week, his most notorious case was one that came from a former law student. "In 1990, he called me and said he wanted to bring 2 Live Crew by my house," Rogow recalled last week. "I told him I didn't know he did immigration work. I live in Miami, and I thought he was talking about some people who were found on a raft somewhere." Rogow soon learned that 2 Live Crew was in fact a rap-music group whose leader, Luther Campbell, was about to face obscenity charges in Broward County for releasing an album called "As Nasty As They Wanna Be." "When I met Luther, and I saw how much publicity this was getting, I told him, 'Even if you lose, you win.' Luther said, 'What kind of jive white-man talk is that?' But when the album sold two million copies he saw my point." In the end, with Rogow's help, Campbell beat the charges.

Last week, in an opinion that closely followed Rogow's argument, Judge Middlebrooks refused to interfere with the counting of votes in Palm Beach and elsewhere. Yet, in the murky course of events, there was no guarantee that Rogow's victory would be permanent, and Middlebrooks' ruling has been appealed. But one of Rogow's admonitions to the Judge remained beyond dispute. "Is it messy? Does it go on and on in some fashion?" Rogow asked. "Yes, yes, it does, but that is democracy."

—*Jeffrey Toobin*

PIETIES
HE'S BACK. AGAIN.

This just in: Richard M. Nixon. Now, the details.

If you're looking for a little twist on the story coming out of Florida—a classic tale of Mutt vs. Jeff (or Punch vs. Judy, or Tweety vs. Sylvester)—here's a David vs. Goliath story for you. David is David Greenberg, a graduate student in American history at Columbia, armed with a library card. Goliath is the massed ranks of the punditocracy, armed with networks, newspapers, and the fearsome power of the conventional wisdom. Goliath says that after the 1960 squeaker Vice-President Nixon and the Republicans, in a gracious, unselfish act of statesmanship, refused to challenge the victory of Senator John F. Kennedy. David says no, that's not what happened. Needless to say, Goliath's view (usually accompanied by the suggestion that Al Gore should do the noble thing, like Nixon) is the prevalent one—so much so that a post-election search of Nexis, the comprehensive news database, for newspaper articles and TV transcripts containing the words "Nixon," "election," "1960," and some variation of "gracious," "unselfish," or "statesman" yields the following error message: "Your search has been interrupted"—rather like a Palm Beach vote count—"because it probably will retrieve more than 1,000 documents."

Actually, David (Greenberg) used to believe the Goliath version, too. Then, in October, he suggested to his editors at the on-line magazine *Slate*, for which he writes a monthly column called "History Lesson," that he take a look at the legend of the stolen 1960 election. In the course of his research, he discovered that the Republicans, far from graciously accepting Kennedy's victory, mounted a ferocious challenge to it. Led by Thruston Morton and Meade Alcorn, the chairman and the general counsel, respectively, of the Republican National Committee, and with the assistance of a phalanx of trusted Nixon aides, including Robert H. Finch and Peter Flanagan, they launched investigations, de-

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Richard Nixon

manded recounts in eleven states (and got them in parts of Illinois and New Jersey), and filed lawsuits in Illinois, New Jersey, and Texas. The effort kicked into high gear three days after the election and continued vigorously until the eve of the final vote in the Electoral College. Greenberg's half-inch stack of microfilm printouts makes interesting reading. For example, the lead editorial in the *Times* for November 26th, under the headline "SETTLING THE ELECTION," warns that if the ongoing Republican challenges succeed "the nation will be facing the most serious predicament in its Presidential history since the Hayes-Tilden battle of 1876-77." As late as December 4th, the *Times* was still running stories with headlines like "ILLINOIS' 27 VOTES REMAIN IN DOUBT/G.O.P. STILL CHARGING FRAUD IN CHICAGO TALLY." Not until December 12th were a pair of lawsuits that had been filed by the Nixon Recount Committee dismissed by an Illinois circuit judge. There is much, much more along these lines.

This bit of history has remained largely hidden for several reasons. Nixon, understandably, does not mention it in his book "Six Crises," which appears to be the main source for the conventional wisdom. Also, Nixon conceded the day after the election, though he did so conditionally ("If this trend does continue and he does become our next President," then congrats), and a concession is a courtesy that has no legal status. The Republican bid to overturn the result was too much of a long shot to get more than intermittent coverage; Kennedy's margin in Illinois was nearly nine thousand votes, a landslide by Bush-Gore standards, and Kennedy would have won the election even without that state's electors. A big difference between then and now was the absence of the media pressure cooker. In 1960, there were no big national newspapers, no talk radio, and no cable-news gabathons. The nightly network news lasted fifteen minutes, including commercials. So it wasn't that hard for Nixon to "distance himself" from his party's frantic efforts.

Greenberg's *Slate* article came out on October 16th. A handful of columnists and commentators have picked up on his findings, but Goliath remains firmly on his feet despite David's direct hit to the forehead. Greenberg, who did a stint as *The New Republic's* managing editor and used to be a researcher for Bob Woodward, did get a nice E-mail, though, from someone he has never met. It begins, "Thanks for keeping the record straight." It ends, "If I can be of any assistance in your broader endeavor, I'd be happy to discuss it. I have more information about the man than I wish. If you are studying Nixon, I need not explain who I am, or how I happen to have such information. Sincerely, John W. Dean."

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

DEPT. OF USEFUL THINGS
OUT OF THE FRYING PAN, INTO THE VOTING BOOTH

My parents have an electric stove in their kitchen made by a company called Moffat. It has four burners on top and a raised panel that runs across the back with a set of knobs on it, and the way the panel is laid out has always been a bone of contention in our family. The knobs for the two left-hand burners are on the left side of the back panel, stacked one on top of the other, with the top knob controlling the back burner and the bottom knob controlling the front burner—same thing on the right-hand side. My mother finds this logical. But not my father. Every time he looks at the stove, he gets confused and thinks that the top knob controls the *front* burner.

Does this mean that my mother is more rational than my father? I don't think so. It simply means that any time you create a visual guide to an action that isn't intuitive—that requires some kind of interpretation or physical contortion—you're going to baffle some people. From the perspective of "usability" researchers, my father has fallen victim to an ill-designed interface. People who pop the trunk of their car when they mean to pop the gas-tank lid are experiencing the same kind of confusion, as the singer John Denver did, apparently, when he died in an airplane crash a few years ago. Denver was flying a new, experimental plane, and may not have realized how little fuel he had, since the fuel gauge wasn't linear, the way you'd expect it to be. When the line on that sort of gauge registers one-quarter, for example, it doesn't mean that the twenty-six-gallon tank is a quarter full; it means that the tank has less than five gallons left.

Then, there's the question of voting. Susan King Roth, an associate professor of visual communication at Ohio State University, did an experiment recently with voting machines and found that a surprising number of the people in her study didn't vote on the issues section of the ballot. Why? Because the issues proposals were at the top of the ballot, sixty-seven inches from the floor, and the eye height of the average American woman is sixty inches. Some people in the study simply couldn't see the proposals.

The Florida butterfly ballot may be the textbook example of what can go wrong when design isn't intuitive. The usability expert Kevin Fox has identified three "cognitive paths" that could have led voters to misunderstand the butterfly layout: gestalt grouping, linear visual search, and numeric mapping—all of which point out that the way the butterfly ballot invites itself to be read does not match the way it invites voters to act. In the language of usability studies, there is an incompatibility between input and output. In a sense, it's just like the problem with the Moffat stove.

My father hasn't burned down the house yet. But sometimes he puts a pot on the back burner and turns on the front burner. If he's used the stove twenty thousand times in his life, it's a reasonable guess that he's made this mistake maybe a few hundred times. In the grand scheme of things, that's not a very high percentage. Then again, sometimes a few hundred mistakes can turn out to be awfully important.

—*Malcolm Gladwell*

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THE FINANCIAL PAGE

THE CREDIT-CARD KINGS

In the nineteen-eighties, credit-card companies divided the world into two kinds of people: those they could trust and those they could not. The trustworthy were given credit cards; they all paid a standard interest rate and annual fee. The untrustworthy—half the people in America—got no credit at all. If they wanted to borrow money, their best option was a trip to the local pawnshop.

This was an odd state of affairs. On the one hand, about a hundred million Americans were eliminated as potential customers. On the other, tens of millions of people who were all very different in their tolerance for risk and their ability (or desire) to pay down debt were treated the same. Credit-card companies adhered to the Industrial Age principle that the best way to answer a problem is to mass-produce a single solution. Henry Ford said that his customers could have their cars painted any color they wanted—as long as it was black. Well, virtually all the credit-card companies said that their customers could have any card, as long as it cost twenty dollars a year and came with an interest rate of 19.8 per cent.

Richard Fairbank and Nigel Morris changed that. They are the visionaries behind Capital One, the most innovative credit-card company in the world. (Visa and MasterCard don't issue cards of their own; they join with financial institutions like Capital One instead.) In the mid-eighties, Fairbank and Morris were management consultants, with no experience in banking or credit cards. But, after studying a big bank's operations for a single day, they decided that the credit-card industry was ripe for revolution. As they saw it, a credit card is not so much a slice of plastic as a formula made up of variables like interest rate, credit line, and cash-advance line, all of which can be changed with a few keystrokes on a computer. So, instead of offering one kind of credit card, they would offer thousands of credit cards, each slightly different. In this way, they would forever alter the way we pay for things—or put off paying for them. Credit cards now come with interest rates and bonus plans tailored to your appetite for debt and risk. Many also come with customized graphics—like the "life-style cards" that bear the logo of your favorite hockey team or your state flower. But the changes have been more than just cosmetic. By coming up with something for everyone, Capital One has democratized credit; these days, pretty much anybody who wants plastic can get it.

Of course, if you're going to lend money to lots of different people at lots of different rates—including people previously deemed unreliable—you have to be able to make fine distinctions among them. You need to know how they spend, how they borrow, and how they procrastinate. Credit-card companies already had a lot of this kind of data, but they had no way of interpreting it—they couldn't turn the data into information. Fairbank and Morris figured out how to do it. First, they adopted new digital technology that separated the useful data from the useless. Second, they started conducting what Fairbank calls "scientific tests on a massive scale," to help them find customers and design products to suit them.

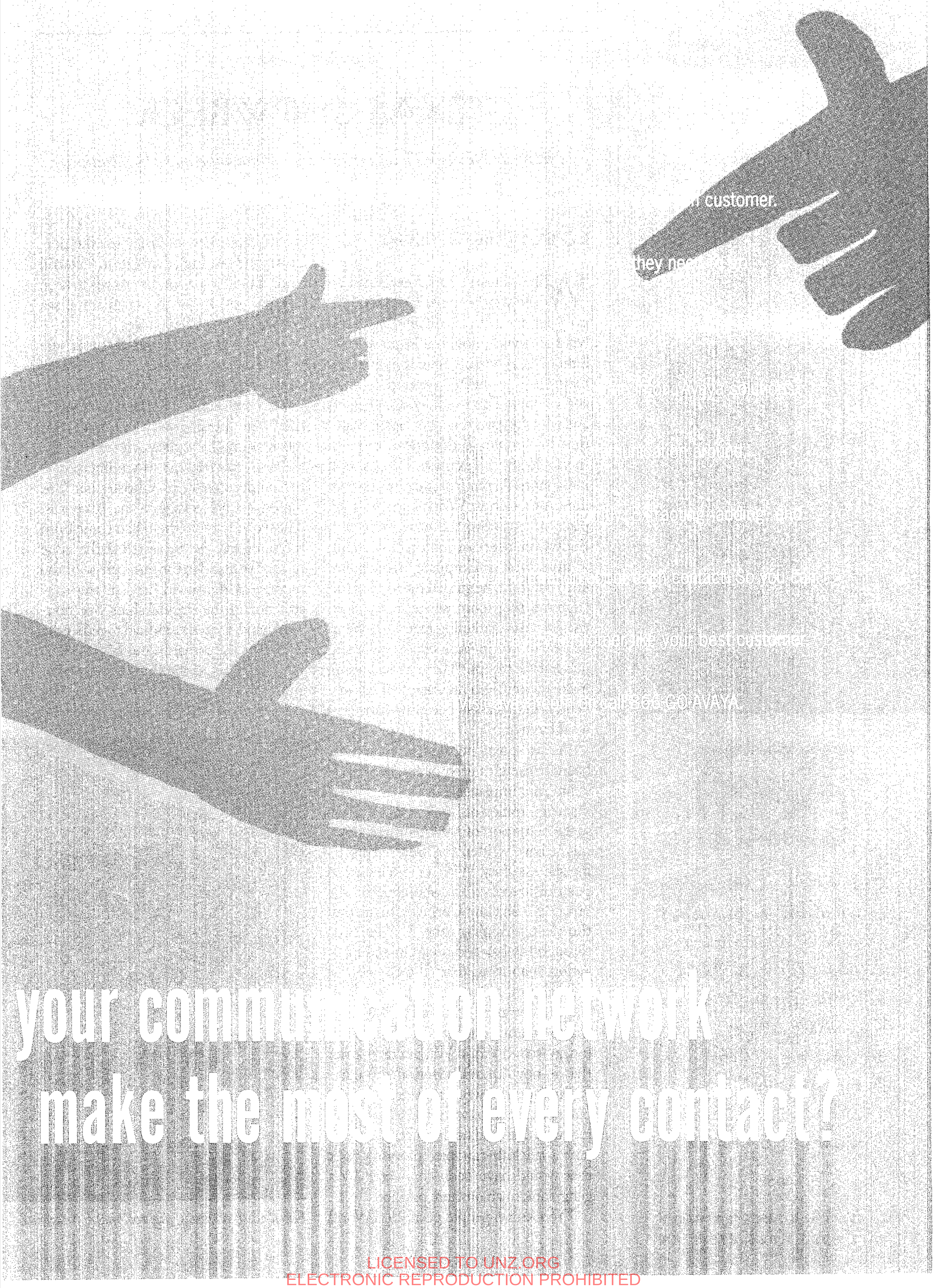
CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

When Fairbank and Morris finally got the chance to put their ideas into practice, they started fiddling with everything. They pioneered the balance-transfer offer and the teaser rate (where you get a lower rate for the first few months). They started slashing interest rates for the best borrowers, and devising appropriate rates for the worst. They tinkered with credit lines, with mileage awards, with the design of the cards, and with the color of the envelopes of their mailings. They tried different ways of retaining customers and pursuing deadbeats. Essentially, they made Capital One an endless experiment.

Here's what this means in practice: When someone at Capital One comes up with an idea for a new product—say, a platinum MasterCard for middle-income hikers who drive Saturn automobiles—the company combs its databases to select the ideal sample audience, then sends out the pre-approval come-ons. Most people throw them in the trash; but some don't. Capital One's mathematical wizards analyze the responses and determine whether the hiker card has legs. This approach enables the company to target smaller and smaller segments of the market. A lot of companies pay lip service to the idea of market research, but Capital One has made it the engine of its business. This year, the company will run close to forty-five thousand different tests. It will try out thousands of new products, most of which will fail. But, Fairbank says, "failure is information, too." There are successes, as well, which is why the company now has thirty million credit-card accounts.

Capital One has, in short, mastered the paradoxical art of mass customization—much as Dell and Amazon have. Mind you, this can't work for everyone. Companies like Procter & Gamble and Levi's have discovered that consumers would rather not have to design their own hair conditioner or their own pair of jeans. But what's clear is that Henry Ford's one-size-fits-all approach was really the product of a time when it just wasn't worth it for companies to build products that matched consumers' individual needs. By showing what can be accomplished with a canny application of market research in an information age, the folks at Capital One have put the American financial-services industry, not to mention thirty million cardholders, in their debt.

—*James Surowiecki*



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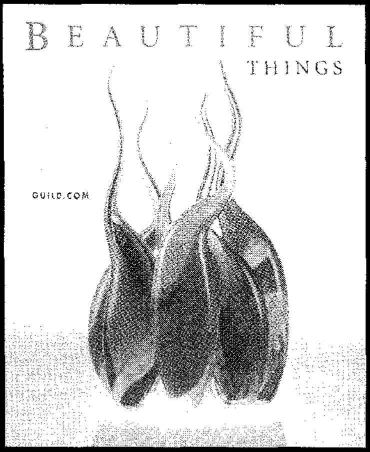

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U.S. JOURNAL

TEXAS SHIPWRECK

How the Niña, the Pinta, and the Santa María sailed into a legal battle.

BY MARK SINGER

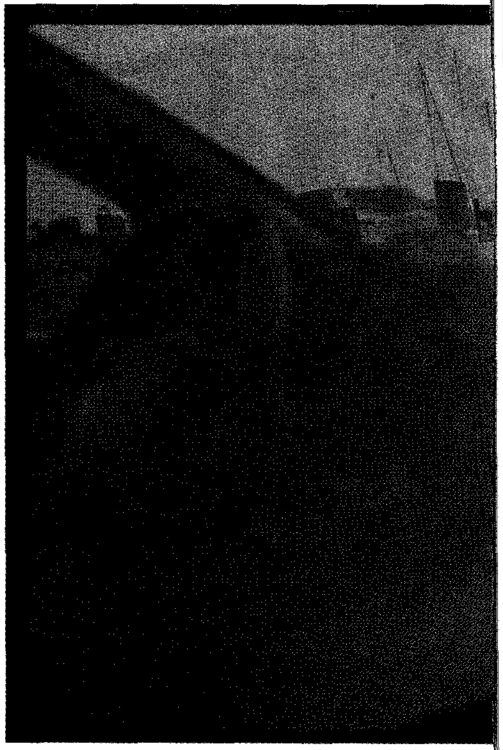
CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS

When Dusty Durrill explains how and why he thinks Corpus Christi's romance with the Columbus ships went so awry—how the Pinta and the Santa María wound up in the sad shape they're in, how the Niña wound up where she is, how all the money disappeared, and why the government of Spain wishes that Dusty would disappear, too—he speaks in plain Texanese, using simple metaphors. At our first meeting, he even drew me a picture. When I arrived at his place of business, the warehouse of a Budweiser-beer distributorship a couple of miles west of Corpus Christi's palm-lined bayfront, he guided me to the same large meeting room where he regularly gathered his marketing team. "Remember, we're not in business to sell beer," he'd tell the troops. "We're in business to make money!"—a message that has evidently been heeded, because Durrill is a wealthy man.

As he spoke, he used a white erase board to sketch a wishful but, once upon a time, not implausible fantasy—a schematic illustration of how Corpus Christi, as the home port of the Columbus ships, might have written for itself an inspiring success story. With a red felt-tipped pen, he described the shoreline of the broad and shallow Corpus Christi Bay, the deep shipping lane that extends through the bay and up an inland navigation channel to form the city's commercial port, and the area, just north of the port entrance, occupied by the Texas State Aquarium and the U.S.S. Lexington, a Second World War aircraft carrier that is now a naval aviation museum. Right there, between those two tourist magnets, the ships would have fit in perfectly, he said, and he drew a circle to denote a sailcloth-canopied mooring dock that would have been connected by a gangplank to an onshore pavilion.

"You know, people go to Sea World for the first time and they see the porpoises and say, 'Hey, that's great,'" Durrill said. "But if you want the crowds to keep coming you've got to put in some sea lions and some killer whales."

Thinking about it later, I wasn't sure whether, in this analogy, the Niña, the Pinta, and the Santa María were porpoises or sea lions or a killer whale. What they were literally was a set of meticulously wrought replicas created by the Spanish government to commemorate the quincentenary of Christopher Columbus's 1492 voyage to the Americas. The wood to build them had come from the same forest—harvested at the same time of year and in the same phase of the moon—as the wood used in the construction of the original ships. Six thousand hand-forged nails held together the replica of the Niña. In the fall of 1991, Las Carabelas, as the ships were known, and their combined crews of sixty-two sailors crossed the Atlantic and, for the



Faced with termites, dry rot, messy financial next nine months, made crowd-pleasing visits to more than a dozen coastal cities.

Fifteen years of research and labor, at a cost of nearly thirteen million dollars, had gone into the launching of Las Carabelas, and it showed. Under sail, they possessed a nobility and splendor that made people weep, and their ten-day sojourn in Corpus Christi, in March, 1992, was by all accounts one of the most successful stops on their itinerary. More than a hundred thousand visitors came aboard. Ticket and souvenir sales netted a hundred and sixty thousand dollars. As the ships departed, the natives gathered along the seawall and applauded. And the Spanish sailors, who had been standing on the ship decks and saluting, applauded back.

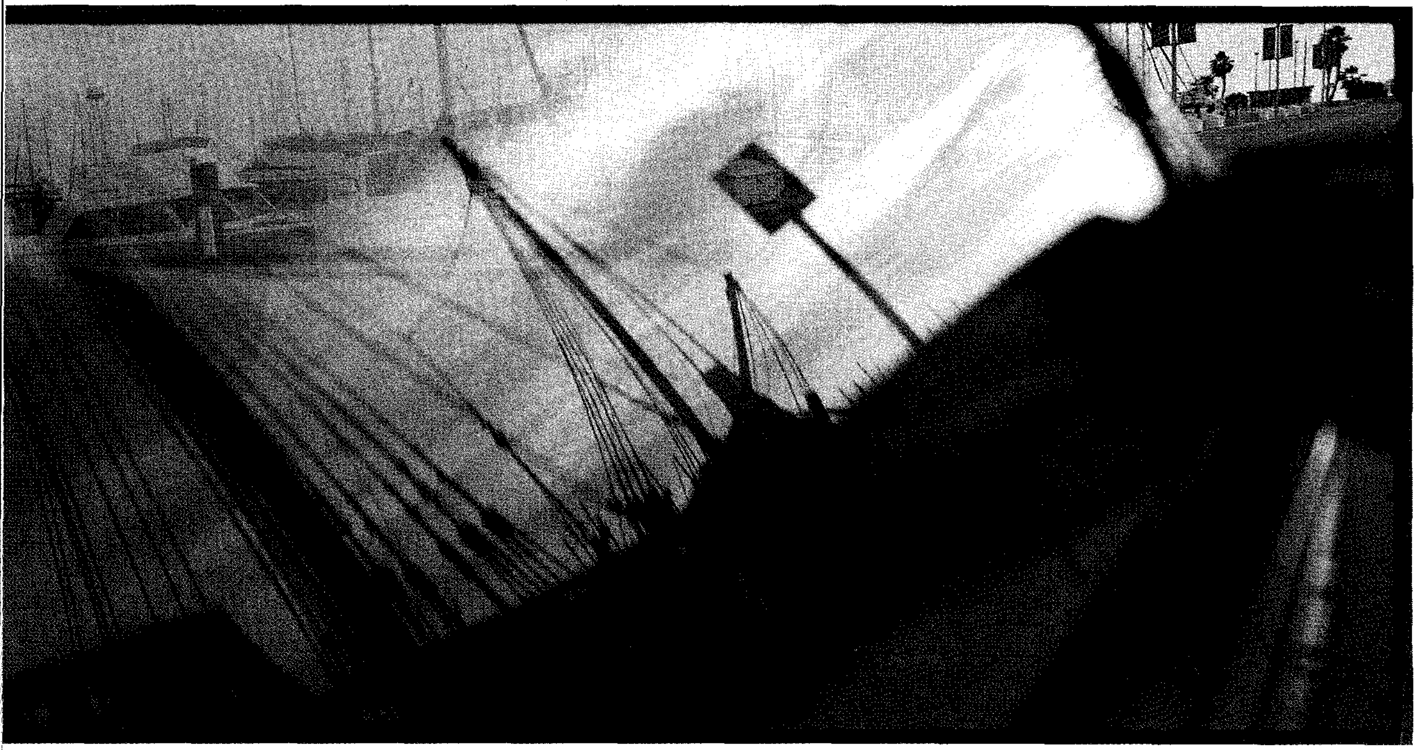
South Texas, of course, lay far beyond the range of Columbus's voyages. The first Spaniards to explore the area around Corpus Christi arrived in the mid-sixteenth century, bringing with them horses and longhorn cattle, contributions that in today's mythology tend to be thought of as indigenously "Texan." That skewed or dimmed sense of history runs along the fault line that has always divided the Anglo and Hispanic halves of Corpus Christi. Since the nineteen-twenties, oil-and-gas production has formed the core of the local economy. The oilpatch plutocrats, plus the usual bankers, business executives, and professionals, in the course of their routine encounters at the country club and the yacht club and the Town Club, have decided what's best for Corpus Christi. In time, an affluent class of Hispanic merchants and professionals developed, but few of its members were invited to sit down at the table. And even those who were didn't rush to get there, because, as a lawyer named Tony Bonilla explained to me, "they were invitations after the fact, after the real decisions had already been made."

The clear subtext of the quincentenary celebration was that, for a change, Anglo and Hispanic Corpus Christi would jointly embrace the city's cultural patrimony. The visit of the Columbus ships offered an ideal symbol. As the hoopla subsided, a group of Corpus Christi business leaders and politicians delivered a successful pitch to bring Las Carabelas back for good. The same crowd had also persuaded the Smithsonian Institution to place on permanent loan in the Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History its Columbus-themed quincentenary exhibit, "Seeds of Change," which examined the effects of European exploration on the New World.

"I thought the ships and the museum would be a major visible flag-flyer for our tourism industry," Durrill said. "Columbus's name is known by every child in the United States, far more so than the city of Corpus Christi. Texas has a history of discarding history, of saying we can build it bigger and better and newer. I thought the whole story needed to be told. Spain changed the face of the world. They brutalized people? Yeah, but, hell, everybody brutalized people. They triggered the exodus from the European nations to the Americas. Religion, farming, the whole shooting match of what occurred. That's the story. The Columbus ships were the perfect way to tell it. And why not in Corpus Christi?"

Instead, the story that people in Corpus Christi have fixated on for several years now is how the master plan Durrill depicted for me never came close to emerging and how, in fact, things have ended up tangibly and symbolically worse than they were before Las Carabelas first sailed into the bay. Specifically, they keep asking how two of the ships ended up high and dry and rotting, the way all aquatic creatures do when wrested from their natural habitats. And how, and for God's sake why, did that white elephant wander into the picture?

Durrill, who is in his mid-sixties, has brown eyes, blond hair that's going gray, a fleshy pink face and beefy physique, and a casual manner that declares he might be mainly about, but isn't only about, business. He grew up in El Paso,



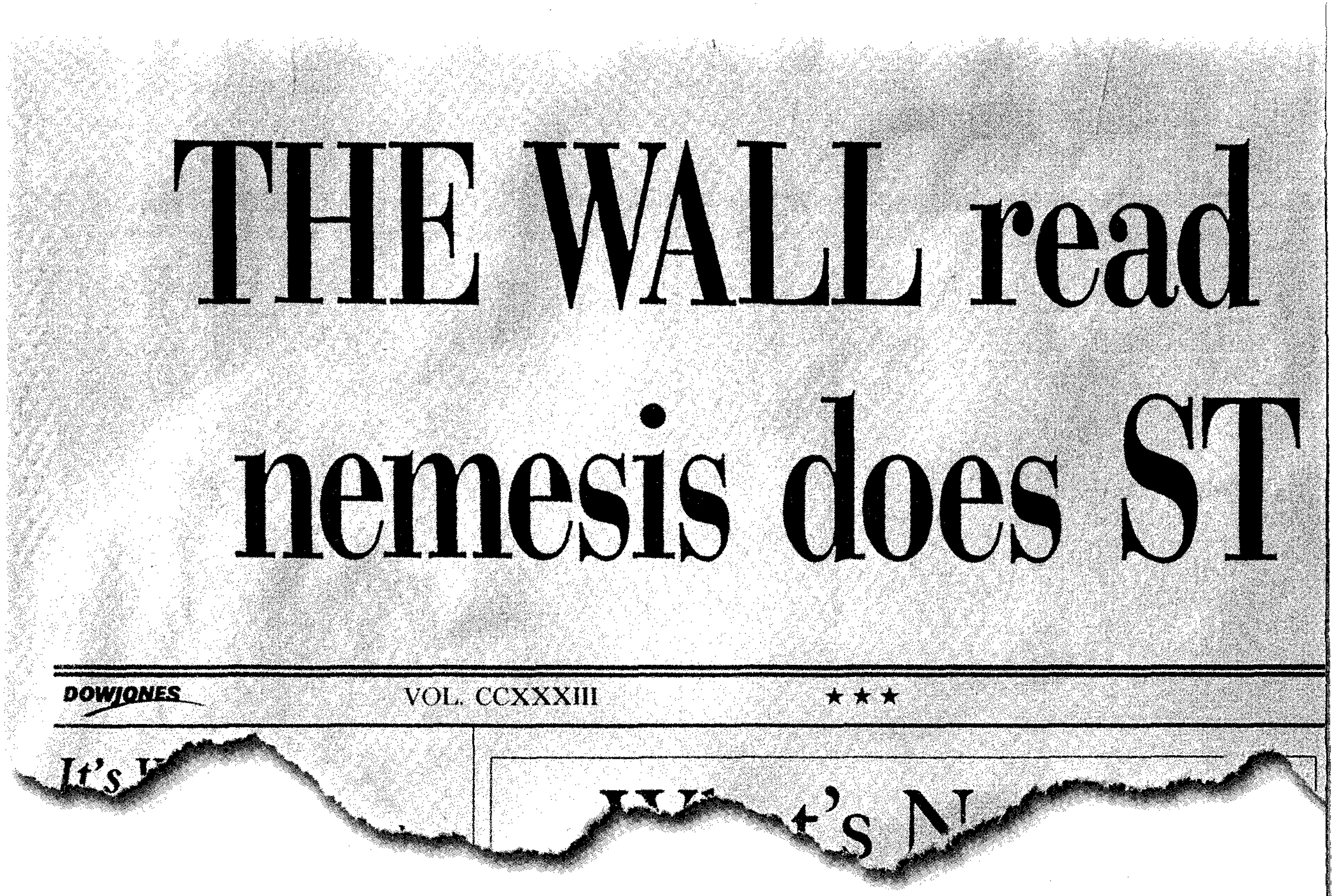
records, and a multi-ship crash, the budget "took on the aspect of a bottomless cookie jar." Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

attended college at Texas A. & M., and first arrived in Corpus Christi in 1957, when he was assigned to the naval air station there. After the military, he worked for an oil company until 1963, when he paid ten thousand dollars for a half interest in a beer distributorship that today does thirty-five million dollars in annual sales. In classic Texas entrepreneurial style, he diversified into ranching, real estate, and other ventures. But part of the Durrill fortune was a by-product of misfortune. In 1978, his daughter Devary, the oldest of five children, died in the crash of a Ford Mustang whose gas tank exploded. In a subsequent lawsuit, the Durrills won punitive damages and collected enough to create the Devary Durrill Foundation and endow it with eight million dollars.

The foundation's most conspicuous civic-beautification endeavor took shape in 1991, on the promenade that extends a mile and a half along the bayfront—a series of eight miradors, elegant hexagonal concrete-and-pink-marble gazebo-like structures, each with a historical marker inside. Durrill spent two years persuading the city government to accept the miradors, and during that time he absorbed a simple lesson that has guided his public-spirited impulses ever since: if you want something done in Corpus Christi and don't mind footing the bill, do it yourself. He picked up most of the tab for a monument that honored the region's earliest Spanish colonist, and did the same for a special mirador and bronze statue erected in memory of Selena, the beatified Tejano singer and Corpus Christi favorite daughter, who was murdered by a deranged fan in 1995.

Obviously, Durrill wasn't old money. Nor did he have political motives. But he did have money that talked, in a language that a lot of people in Corpus Christi had trouble decoding. When he reflected upon the town's separate and unequal Anglo and Hispanic subcultures, he concluded, "I don't think they've figured me out—either side. Everyone thinks you've got to have an axe to grind. They think I'm looking for a turkey to cut its head off. But there's no turkey. I'm curious about how things got to where they are, and I like to leave things better than I found them."

Even before Las Carabelas came into port, the campaign to get them back permanently had been under way for years. Because other cities were also competing for the ships, self-restraint seemed imprudent: the Texas legislature passed a resolution supporting Corpus Christi's bid, thousands of schoolchildren wrote imploring letters to King Juan Carlos I, and the mayor of Corpus Christi, in a letter to the fleet's Spanish overseers, declared that Las Carabelas had "brought my city together as I have never seen it united." Another selling point, or so it seemed, was that the Museum of Science and History had mounted a display of objects salvaged from three Spanish sailing vessels that ran aground off Padre Island, about fifty miles south of Corpus Christi Bay, during a storm in April, 1554. That this exhibit was entitled "Shipwreck!" no one regarded as ominous.



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In May, 1993, the government of Spain—represented by an entity called the Spain '92 Foundation—succumbed to the entreaties from Texas and agreed to deliver the ships to a newly chartered Corpus Christi organization called the Las Carabelas Columbus Fleet Association. On paper, the deal looked straightforward enough. The association would pay Spain '92 a million one hundred thousand dollars up front, plus the first half million of net revenues, after which the two parties would evenly divide the profits. A foundation in San Antonio contributed a hundred thousand toward the down payment, and a group of Corpus Christi banks lent the rest.

At this point, Durrill became a player. The ships had wintered in New York, and something more expedient than favorable winds was needed to return them to Corpus Christi. Durrill, who had a well-established reputation as the guy you go to when you need big money in a hurry, agreed to lend a hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the cost of towing. While he was at it, he also guaranteed nine hundred thousand dollars of the Columbus Fleet Association's debt to the banks. Again and again, he deployed his foundation's checkbook in moments of urgency. Why didn't the association dig into its own pocket? Because, from the start, it had very little operating capital. All income projections were predicated upon Las Carabelas becoming a major attraction, with a cash flow that could presumably be leveraged into grand schemes.

A radically condensed history of the Columbus Fleet Association goes like this: the cash never really flowed. The blow-by-blow version comprises equal measures of tragicomedy and farce. "THOUSANDS WATCH AS LAS CARABELAS COME HOME" was the headline in the Corpus Christi *Caller-Times* the June day after the ships docked on the bayfront. That same week, a tropical storm blew in, causing the bay waters to surge and threatening to lift the ships onto the dock. No damage was inflicted, but the site was now deemed too risky. Las Carabelas moved around the corner, inside the navigation channel, to a berth intended for cargo vessels. Among this location's drawbacks: low visibility, low pedestrian and tourist traffic, bad fit. To make the ships accessible, barges equipped with ladders had to be brought in—barges procured and paid for by Durrill.

Six weeks' worth of high-season revenues were lost while the new site was being prepared, so that during 1993 only slightly more ticket buyers came aboard than had done so during the ten-day quincentenary visit. Already, relations had become strained between the association and Spain '92, whose president, Rafael Mazarrasa, dispatched letters that were a litany of complaint. The physical maintenance of the ships was inadequate, the finances were deficient, and, on balance, there was concern that the association wasn't paying "due respect to the historical values and the public image of Spain." To keep the operation fiscally afloat during the slow autumn and winter months, Durrill and two other board members made

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"You have to admit that your chip looks a lot like their chip."

loans. The good news was that summer was coming. This, however, was superseded by seriously bad news, which arrived early one morning in April, 1994—when conditions were sufficiently calm so that, afterward, the pilot of a tugboat that was towing an oceangoing barge couldn't produce a very satisfactory explanation of why it had plowed into the Pinta, causing *it* to plow into the Santa María.

The maritime legal term for what had occurred—an unwelcome encounter between a moving vessel and a stationary one—was "allision." Or, in Durrill's more vivid rendering, "The media got ahold of it, said the ships had been sunk."

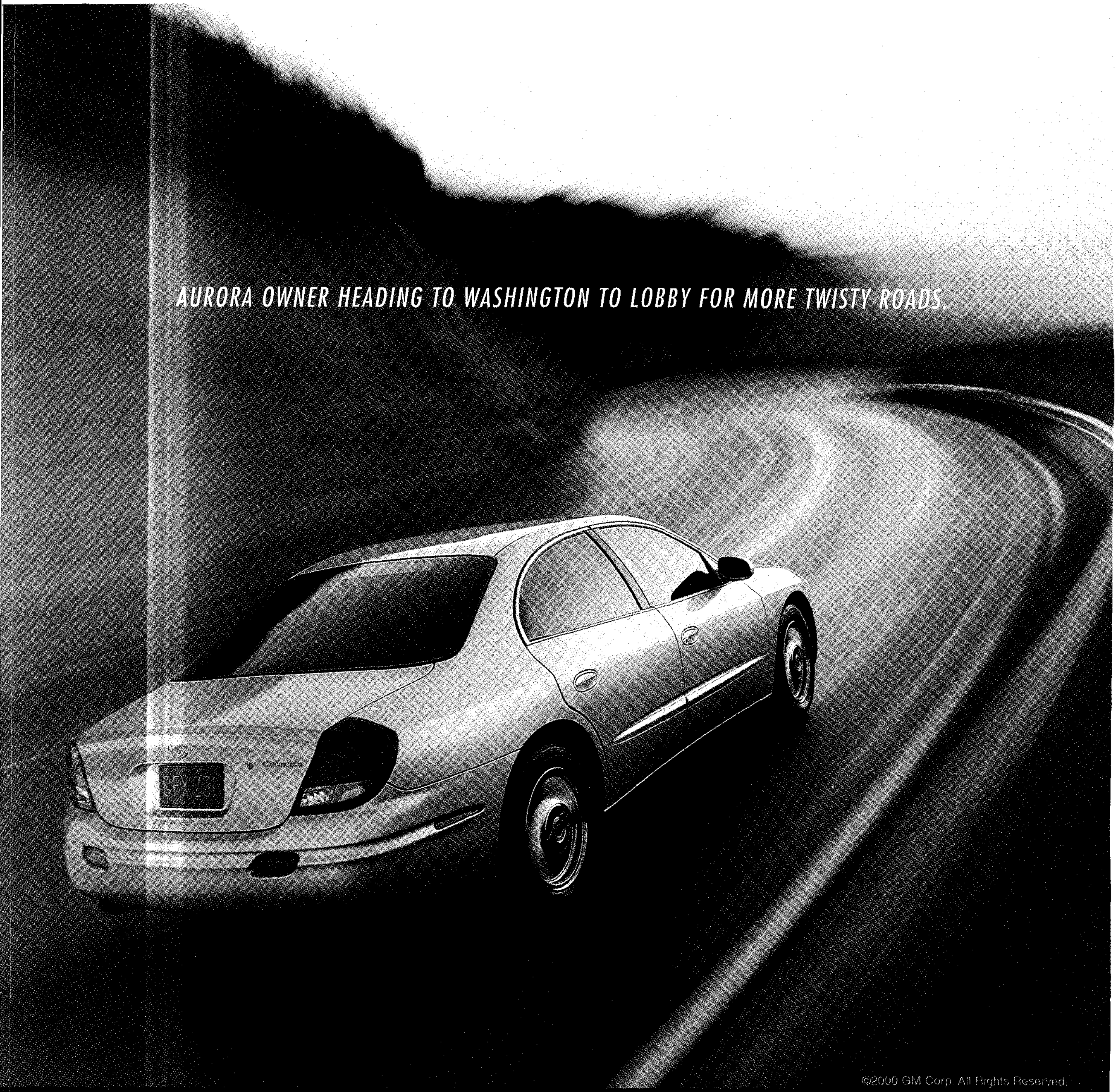
As it was, the barge had struck the Pinta's port bow and pushed the ship backward, punching a hole above the waterline in the bow of the Santa María—its main yard also got clipped—and snapping the Pinta's mizzenmast. Bid requests were sent to dozens of shipyards, and a repair estimate came in at a million and a half dollars. With an insurance settlement pending, the association addressed the question of how to keep the ticket window open; the Niña, after all, was unharmed, and the two other ships—well, they hadn't *really* sunk. The strategy that evolved over the next few months, during which Durrill became chairman of the association, ultimately fell into the it-seemed-like-a-good-idea-at-the-time category. A working shipyard would be built at the Museum of Science and History, and visitor traffic would flow from the "Seeds of Change" installation at the museum to this open-air plaza, where real live shipwrights could be observed as they went about their tasks. That, in any case, was the concept—a little piece of Epcot right there in Corpus Christi.

In the spring of 1995, thirteen months after the barge mishap, Santa María Plaza—or what a lot of people in Corpus Christi, when they aren't calling it a white elephant, now refer to as "that three-million-dollar piece of concrete"—opened for business, more or less. In fairness, it needs to be said that the shipyard plaza cost only $2.9 million, paid for with a public-bond issue, and that price included a neat set of heavy-duty power tools.

Another big event in 1995 was the receipt of a check for $1.7 million from Lloyd's of London, the association's insurance carrier. This amount, it was understood, would cover only the cost of fixing the ships, with nothing left to pay for, say, placing them in a tourist-friendly marina. The association immediately filed suit against the owner of the errant barge, seeking, among other things, additional compensation for the loss of potential revenues—a piece of litigation that, in the end, went nowhere.

It's difficult to find anyone in Corpus Christi—not even Dusty Durrill—who can offer a lucid explanation of why it took three years to complete the repairs, or precisely how the association managed, in effect, to bankrupt itself. The first shipwright to attempt the job, Phillip du Pre, offered some insight in a July, 1997, letter to the then chairman of the association. Having recently departed, du Pre was in the mood to unburden himself. "The shipyard budget took on the aspect of a bottomless cookie jar with hands dipping into it until it (the budget) no longer reflected reality," he wrote. The substance of du Pre's complaint was reported in a series of investigative articles last spring in the *Caller-Times*, which characterized the fleet's financial records as "a mess."

A situation that especially aggrieved du Pre arose in the spring of 1997, when the salaried president of the association arranged for the Niña to go on a ten-week road show aboard a truck. According to du Pre, this boondoggle, called the Texas Discovery Tour, "constantly drained manpower. . . . Shipwrights were used to build information kiosks, load trucks, work as road crew, and my favorite, serve as tour guides." The tour's destination was a high-end real-estate development in a Dallas suburb. It passed through dozens of small towns, rewarding thousands of landlocked Texans, as well as the crews of pole climbers for various utility companies who stayed busy relocating power lines, cables, street lights, and traffic signals that lay in the ship's path. Though it's not clear that this excellent adventure netted any income, a board member of the association told me that it did yield one distinct dividend: when the Niña returned, its ballast was removed, revealing termite infestation. "And after the termites were discovered,"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he said brightly, "the flooring was removed to look for more termites, and we found dry rot, which would have gone undetected for who knows how long."

The timing proved propitious—just ahead of the arrival of a new team of shipwrights, from Spain this time, and from the same firm, as it happened, that had built the Santa María. The shipwrights dealt with the termite and dry-rot damage and completed their work on the other ships in the spring of 1998, on schedule and within budget. People connected to the Columbus Fleet Association were less thrilled to learn from the shipwrights that the collision damage to the Pinta and the Santa María could have been repaired just as easily in the water as in drydock. The shipyard plaza next to the museum, in other words, had been completely unnecessary.

In Corpus Christi one afternoon last month, I went to the Museum of Science and History for a look at the Pinta and the Santa María. A staff member unlocked a back door that led to the half-acre concrete plaza. Heavy metal cables secured both ships, in case a hurricane happened by, but nature had already taken its toll in other ways. The paint on the main decks was flaked, and there was obvious evidence of dry rot. Along the perimeter of the plaza, a riot of weeds and mesquite trees flourished. Life-size headless plywood cutouts of Columbus, King Ferdinand, and Queen Isabella were propped in front of the Santa María, patiently awaiting photo ops.

The ships and the plaza have been closed to the public since October of last year, when the board of the Columbus Fleet Association declared that it no longer had the funds to operate or maintain them. Under the circumstances, the board exercised what seemed its only logical option and sent a letter to the Spain-U.S.A. Foundation (a successor to Spain '92), inviting it to come get Las Carabelas.

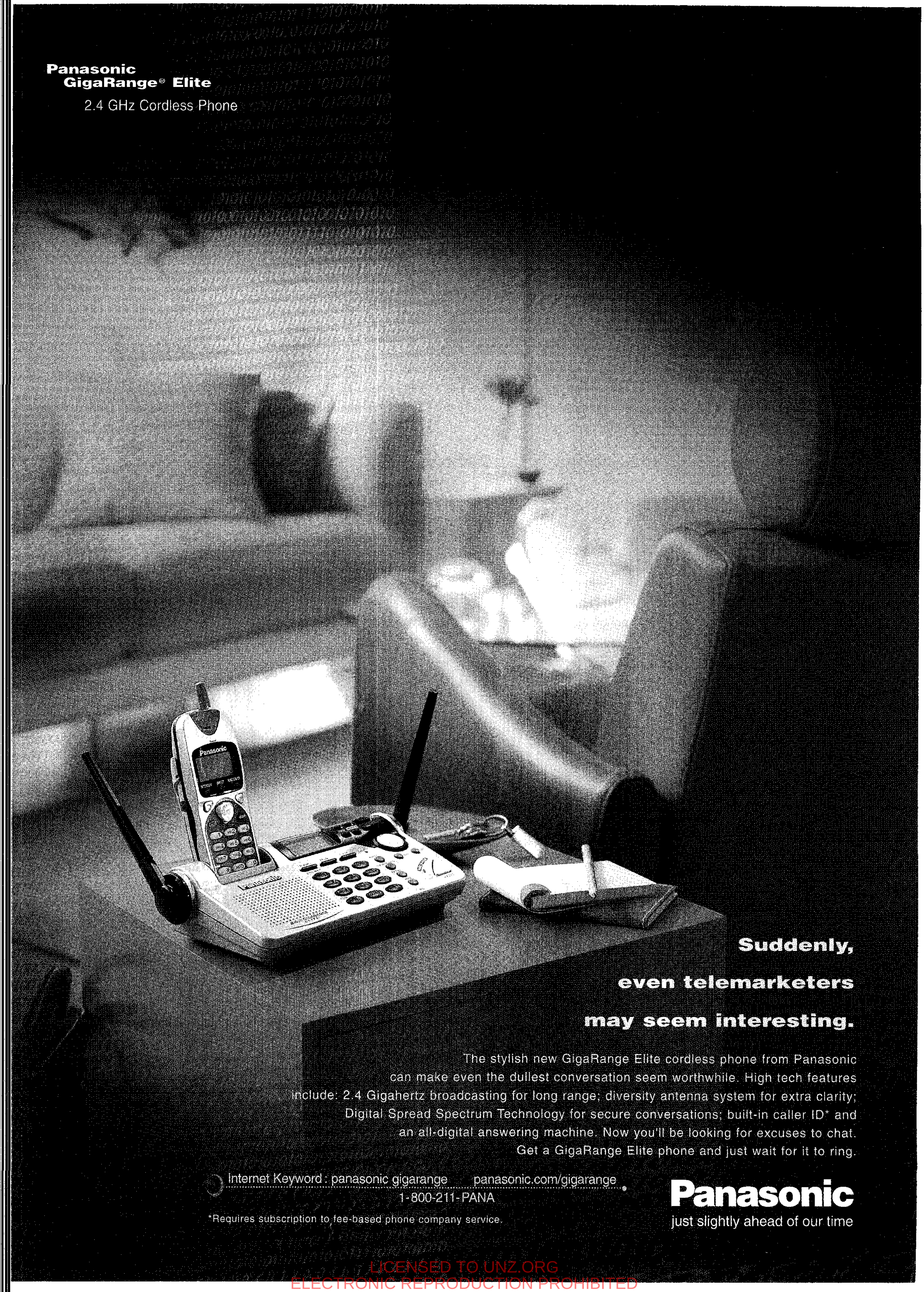
When that happened, Durrill responded in a manner both calculated and confounding. He bought the association's bank loan and also filed liens against the ships—maneuvers that put him in the position of being both the principal benefactor and the principal creditor of the association. Spain, naturally, would be more than happy to reclaim the ships. But Durrill, who has resigned from the association, stands in its way. Picking a fight with Spain hasn't exactly enhanced Durrill's reputation in his home town, especially among a lot of Hispanics. The wounded feelings exposed by this debacle, it seems, are less rooted in the conflict between Spain and a citizen of Corpus Christi than in Corpus Christi's conflicts with itself. In such situations, the impulse always exists to point a finger of blame, and Durrill has set himself up as the most logical target.

"Dusty, I think, is well-meaning," a Hispanic leader told me. "But, unfortunately, because he's put up all the money he wants to call all the shots, and that turns off a lot of folks on my side of town. All those things he's built and paid for around here—in the final analysis, they constitute monuments to Dusty Durrill. We don't need a *patron*—we watched all those movies, and those days are gone."

Durrill, meanwhile, says he has a debt-reorganization plan that could work. In print, he declines to get too specific about the details, fearing that it will undermine his tactics against Spain, but he's convinced there's a way not only to keep Las Carabelas in Corpus Christi but to get all three ships back in the water.

"We got some stubbed toes and bruised knees," he said the other day, "but we can still tell the story of the Spanish discovery of the New World right here in Corpus Christi, and we should. The Big Kahuna—Spain—is up there hollering, posturing, unable or unwilling to address the debt on my note. As it is, I'm stuck with that debt. And I'm saying is it better to be stuck with it with the ships still here or with the ships gone? I'll tell you my position. My position is that, legally, Spain's position doesn't hold water."

On my last day in Corpus Christi, I stopped at a city-owned marina—situated equidistant from a pair of Durrill Foundation miradors—and parked next to the Niña, which I recognized because it was the only three-masted fifteenth-century-replica sailing vessel in the neighborhood. Except for a couple of small Spanish flags, mounted on the stern and port aft railings, it seemed anonymous and forlorn. A "No Trespassing" sign hung over the port gunwale. The ropes for the mast rigging were in place, and the ship's dark, weathered, unvarnished exterior conveyed a solid impression of seaworthiness. But it hadn't been sailed for over half a year, and it wasn't going anywhere soon. ♦



THE MUSIC SCENE

BEEF STEW

How Greg Brown became a cult hero.

BY MATT DELLINGER

The only light in a spearfishing dark house comes up from the frozen lake beneath it. A typical dark house is a wood-framed shack with black canvas walls, just tall enough to stand in and just large enough for a couple of people to sit in. It's a rickety little fortress, with a square that glows like a television screen cut through its icy floor, where a fisherman can watch the algae-green glimmer of lake water, weeds, and, maybe, northern pike.

"You want songs to be big," Brown says. "Room for people to come in and kick their shoes off and then throw something." Photograph by Danny Clinch.

Spearfishing is a strange, cold pastime—a sport in which a person waits huddled over two lines, one with live bait and one with a decoy, and then drops a six-foot barbed pitchfork into an unsuspecting fish. The real skill is in understanding the variables of attraction: sometimes the pike go for the live bait and sometimes for the decoy, sometimes they come up close and stay, sometimes they strike fast and go, sometimes you have to "swim" the decoy around so the pike can see it, sometimes too much movement scares them off. It's a frustrating game. But there is an art to the patience. You don't grip the spear intently the whole time. You lean it, business side down, within arm's reach for when the big moment arrives.

Greg Brown, a fifty-one-year-old Midwestern singer-songwriter, is a natural at this style of waiting. Spearfishing last January in the town of Elk River, Minnesota, I sat in the dark with Brown and his friend of nearly thirty years, Jamie Banks, smoking and drinking Jack Daniel's from plastic cups. Staring vigilantly into a bright lake from inside a cold, dark hut can provoke some long silences, but it is also a good excuse for talking about friends and news and various odd little places all over the country—a Minnesota men's quilting bee. Brown sat beside a propane heater with his gloves off, listening more than he talked, slowly steering a decoy by its line. His fingers are squared, and, like many guitar players, he seems to have calluses down to the second knuckle. (His left thumb is without its tip; he lost it years ago while working at a meatpacking plant.) Wearing a long, heavy black coat and sunglasses, Brown looked like a reformed outlaw turned sheriff. He is six feet two, solid, leathery, with a trimmed beard running along his jawline. I can imagine him saying, calmly, convincingly, in his beef-stew bass, "Come on, now, son, put that gun down."

There must be at least a shred of a song in this—a song about, say, friendship, or winter, or feeling like a speared fish. Brown was in Minnesota for two weeks, ostensibly to work on his fifteenth solo album, "Covenant." But he often schedules sessions so that he can get a little fishing in. He's made a career of not making a career—an approach that over the past thirty years has earned him a certain eminence, even a cult following, in the folk-music scene. One of Brown's admirers, the late writer Andre Dubus, used to call him "the famous fucking folksinger." His previous studio album, "Slant 6 Mind" (a slant 6 is a durable car engine that was introduced in the sixties), sold sixty thousand copies and was nominated for a Grammy. His intimate live performances are his real achievement, though, and draw thousands of devotees every year. Brown's music is fixed in American mythology—cars, wandering, loneliness, love, innocence and the loss of it. But what seems to enrapture people, particularly Midwesterners—and particularly women—is that his emotionally complex songs are steeped in rural testosterone. It's as if Johnny Cash sang Joni Mitchell songs, and meant them.

Outside, the bright white cold turned a colder pink and orange, and we were hungry and due at a friend's house for northern-pike chowder. Our spears remained unbloodied.

Folk music, like high-school football, is not really booming—it's just still there. But listeners tend to be a strongly invested audience. They crowd into shows in coffeehouses, church basements, and small theatres. They camp out in tents at

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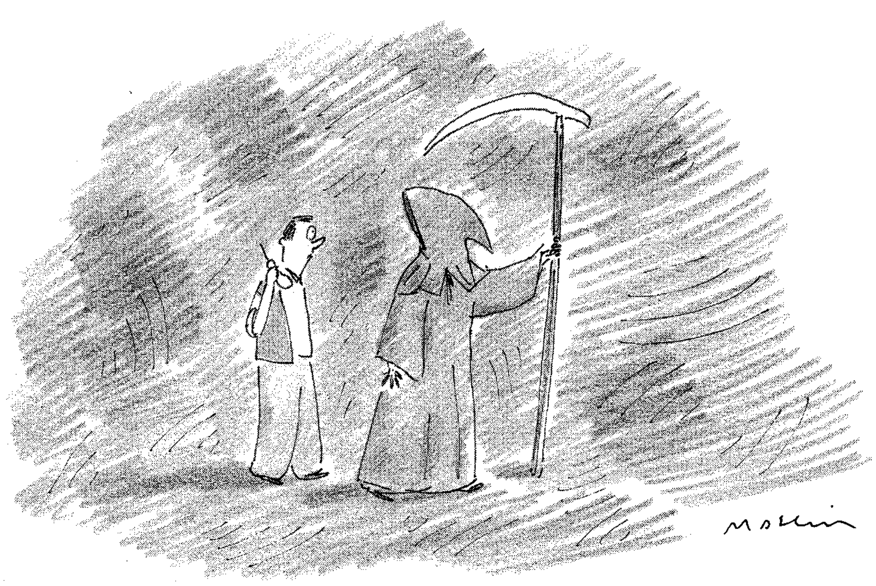


"Please turn off any electronic devices and refrain from using your cell phone as we pass through the darkness and into the light."

festivals across North America; they listen to sensitive, sometimes self-righteous radio stations; and they read magazines with names like *Dirty Linen*, *Crossroads*, and *No Depression*. Internet sites have generated an unprecedented folkie camaraderie, but because the labels that produce folk music are often small, with meagre marketing budgets, new listeners are won over largely by fans who give tapes to friends. That is how Ani DiFranco first heard of Greg Brown, whom she invited to join her on a nationwide tour last spring. Several years ago, Brown's booking agent gave DiFranco, who was not yet famous, a tape of Brown's album "Dream Café." She was impressed, and wrote a song about her timidity upon finally meeting him—"This Bouquet," released on her 1995 album "Not a Pretty Girl." (She will appear on a Greg Brown tribute album, along with Lucinda Williams, Shawn Colvin, Mary-Chapin Carpenter, Gillian Welch, Iris DeMent, Stacey Earle, and other female performers, which will be released next year.)

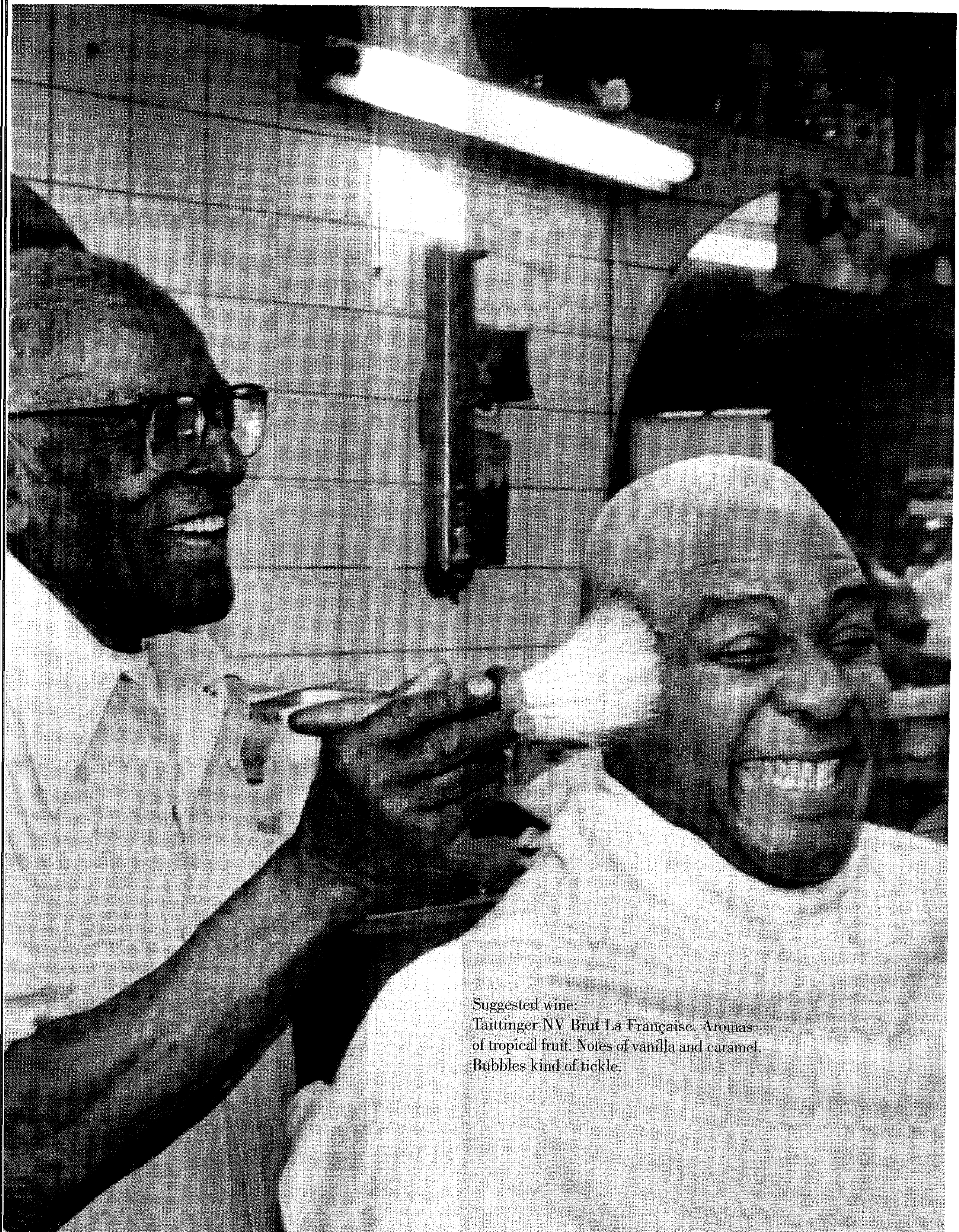
A number of Brown's fans have told me they find him intimidating, but he routinely talks to his admirers before and after performances, and sometimes joins them for a late dinner after the show, or even for lunch before leaving town the next day. "I'm not much of a hang-out-in-the-dressing-room, go-out-and-play, get-off kind of guy," he says. "I like to shoot the shit." He's polite but not patronizing, confident but unassuming. He never gets nervous, he says, and he never makes set lists. He often doesn't know what key he'll sing a song in. He talks onstage, too, delivering mid-song improvisational monologues about his family, life on the road, the city he happens to be in, his thoughts on recent events in his life, including—if he's working his way into "Slow Food," a love song about spending a languorous afternoon with your beloved, preparing an evening meal—what he's just eaten. Rita Houston, the music director of WFUV, in New York, who has seen Brown perform many times, says that, unlike artists who "think that if they just put their hearts on the line people should want to hear it," he never wallows in the confessional. Yet to witness a live set of old songs mixed with new ones is to wade through many layers of personal geology. Over the years, Brown has mined small allegorical folktales that people tend to want to make their own. He says, "You want songs to be big—room for people to come in and kick their shoes off and then throw something."

Greg Brown grew up in Kansas and Missouri but mainly in Iowa, where he was born and where he lives now, and which, in keeping with folk tradition, he sings about a lot. His father, who died last year, was an itinerant preacher and moved from town to town and from denomination to denomination. "He was not a narrow guy," Brown says. An acerbic quality finds its way into much of Brown's material, but it's at its most concentrated in songs where he's defending the sweet and the pure, like "Just by Myself" (an I-don't-need-companionship ditty), "Poor Backslider" (about a born-again churchgoer slipping back into sin), and "Boomtown" (a knock on New Agers, tourists, and urban refugees who have plagued places like New Mexico, where his mother and sister live). His early material is filled with reminiscences of his two grandmothers. "Ella Mae" honors his father's mother, a native of the Ozarks who, with only a second-grade education, wrote nature poetry. (Brown set several of her poems to music when he was a teen-ager.) His maternal grandmother, Lala, lived on a farm in the Hacklebarney region of Iowa, and his visits there inspired "Canned Goods," one of his most requested songs: "Peaches on the shelf, potatoes in the bin. / Supper's ready, everybody come on in / and taste a little of the summer."

I once asked him about the relationship between a performer and his audience. He recalled being on tour when his grandmother Lala died, in 1988. After her funeral, he was preparing for a show in Marblehead, Massachusetts, and, he said, "I remember being backstage and thinking, I'm a wreck. And I wasn't going to go out. And then I did. And the audience was so kind to me. So now when I go out and play, I trust the audience, and I feel like I want to get in touch with them."

One day a few years ago, Rita Houston was on the air when a listener phoned in and asked her to play "Canned Goods." (Houston plays it every Thanksgiving.) The call was made from a cell phone at a cemetery where the caller's grandmother had just been buried. As Houston cued the song, the caller explained that the family—"aunts from New Jersey, cousins from Brooklyn"—was about to leave the graveyard in cars and hired limousines. All of them turned on their radios, and as they drove away from the cemetery they listened to Greg Brown singing.

Brown's musical career began when he was eighteen. He won a songwriting contest in Iowa City and was invited to open a show for Eric Andersen, a New York folksinger with a respectable



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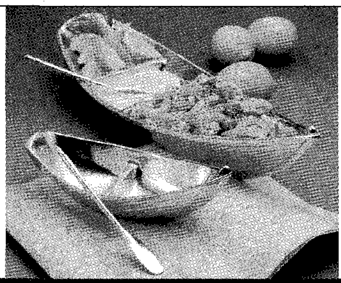

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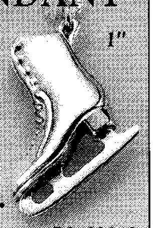

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following, who encouraged him to come East. Brown took a bus to New York in 1969 and led hootenannies at Gerde's Folk City, which gave him a place to sleep in return for cleaning and fixing up a new venue for the club. But, after a year there, Brown left to be with a woman he loved, in Oregon. He ended up back in Iowa without her and played Midwestern gigs for a few years before deciding to quit music. "I thought I'd really been around and seen the deal," he says. "I just didn't foresee myself having a life as a professional musician. I thought I would have a weekend band and an outdoor job and a little farm." Brown was twenty-two. He married his first wife, Melanie (who is now a doctor), had a child (the first of three daughters), and held various blue-collar jobs. After several years, he eased back into performing full time, and made a decent living doing coffeehouse and college gigs. "But I felt like I was on a track going around, and musically nothing was exciting me too much," he says. One night in Boston, in 1980, when Brown was thirty and married to his second wife—Sarah, a painter—with a second daughter to care for, he decided again to quit. "I thought, No more eight-by-ten glossies. No more talking to club owners. It's over."

When Brown got back to Iowa, however, he learned that Minnesota Public Radio had called to offer him a guest spot on "A Prairie Home Companion." Between 1983 and 1986, he performed weekly on the show, and has appeared regularly since. (These performances gave him his nationwide following.) Soon after the broadcasts began, Carlos Santana and Willie Nelson each asked his permission to record "They All Went to Mexico," a song he had written about being abandoned by his girlfriend, his old buddy, and his dog. And then, Brown says, music got fun again.

In the early eighties, Brown started his own label, Red House Records; he was joined in 1983 by a schoolteacher named Bob Feldman, who is now the president and sole owner of the company. A stocky, bald man with a goatee and glasses, Feldman talks about Brown alternately as a hero and as a favorite brother. He first saw Brown perform at a coffeehouse in Minneapolis in 1982. At the time, Feldman was teaching a class called "How to Start Your Own Small Business with No Money" at a local high school. "I felt like everything that I'd ever seen, everything I'd ever listened to, all the music I always loved was coming out of Greg," he says. Feldman began promoting Brown the next day, and three years later he left teaching to run the label. It is often difficult and expensive to get major chain stores to stock Red House albums, Feldman says, but the label, which now records almost fifty folk and blues artists, has never lost money. Brown himself has put out an album almost every year since 1983. Feldman says, "Every one has sold more than the one before it."

Brown never envisioned Red House growing as large as it has. "My intention was just to put out my records, because no one else wanted to," he says. Now people do. Last summer, in addition to "Covenant," he put out a second album, "Over and Under," on a small Iowa City label called Trailer Records. The initial pressing of twenty-five hundred copies sold fast over the Internet and out of cardboard boxes at gigs. There has been a second pressing, and the overwhelming response has prompted Trailer's owner, Dave Zollo, a thirty-one-year-old with a local music career of his own, to hire his first employee.

"The deal" is a term one hears often from Midwesterners, and Brown uses it in lyrics and in speech. It can be used generically, as a synonym for "thing" (as in, "I played at some kind of citywide New Year's Eve deal"). But it can also mean something larger and more important, like, vaguely, "the world" ("I thought I'd really been around and seen the deal") or "life" ("Then you'll know what it is with this deal," Brown sings on "Covenant." "Then you'll feel what it is that I feel"). And sometimes it means something even larger, even vaguer, and even more important: the metaphysical deal.

If anyone says "deal" more than Brown, it's Bo Ramsey, Brown's fellow-Iowan, electric guitarist, and frequent sidekick. Ramsey, who has put out three albums of his own on Trailer Records, helped take Brown's music in a new direction on the 1989 album "One Big Town." The year before, Ramsey, a thin man with curly brown hair who seems always to wear cowboy boots, a straw cowboy hat, and a shirt buttoned to the

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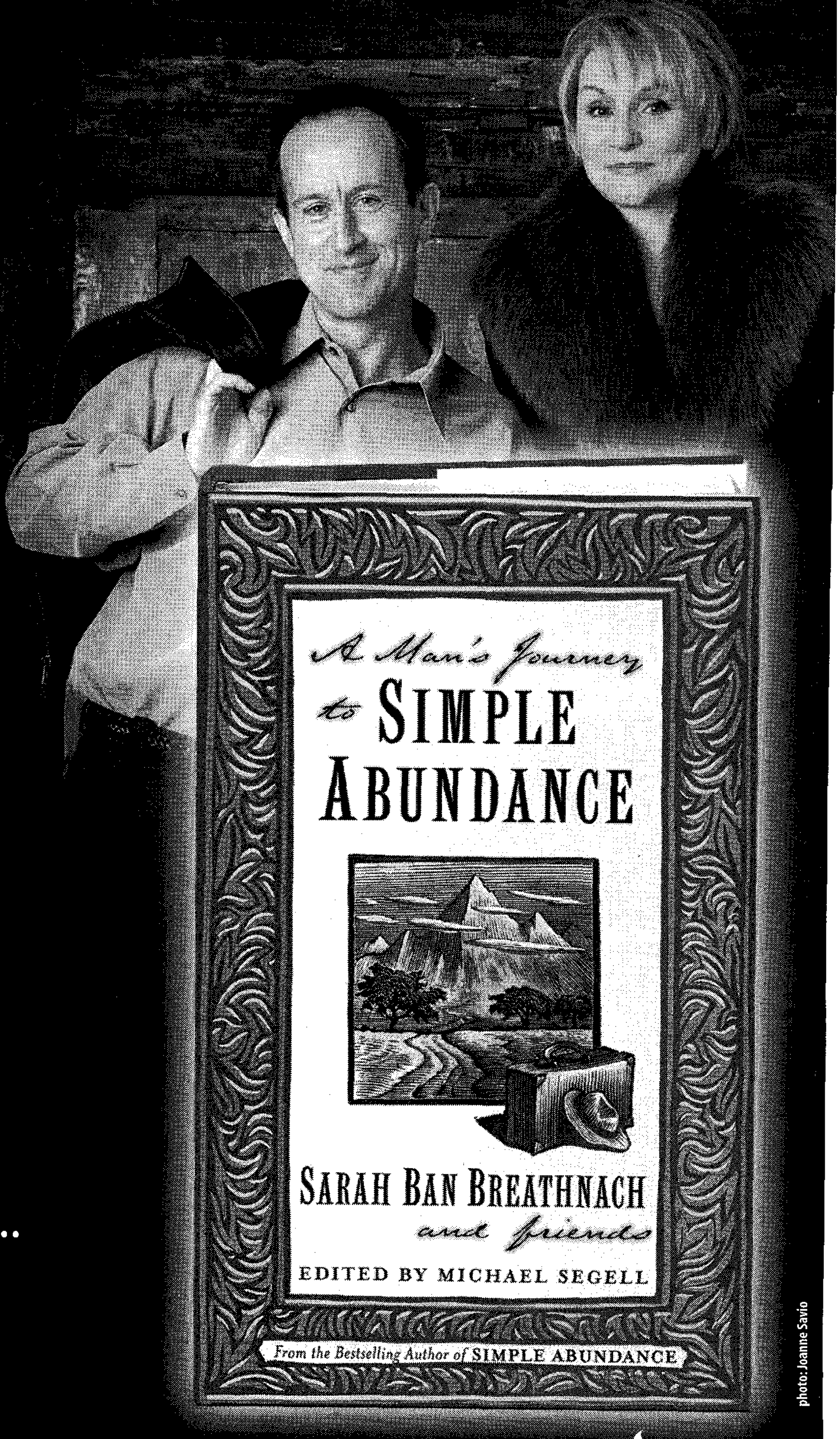
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neck, had been touring with his roots-rock band when he turned on a car radio and heard Brown singing. Ramsey had admired Brown's songwriting for years, but "the music was all acoustic and mandolins and stuff," he says. "I thought it would be cool to experiment." When Ramsey paid Brown a visit and explained his ideas, Brown agreed, and Ramsey has served as co-producer on most of Brown's albums since. He has nudged Brown toward a more rock-and-blues sound, but he hesitates to credit himself for any change in Brown's singular songwriting style. "I'm not a writer like Greg is," he says. "He's a real writer, you know. He's really got his deal all set up around that."

When they tour together in Brown's Dodge pickup, Ramsey says, "Greg's always writing." Brown writes in the car, in motel rooms, in restaurants with friends. "Being on the road with Greg is just aces. It's the smoothest gig I've ever encountered. It's a lot of great conversation. Music reminds me of hitchhiking. They're connected in some way. The freedom, or just the Not Sure Where You're Gonna Arrive, you know? Music is a big, big deal. It really is a big deal. It's bigger than I think we even begin to comprehend."

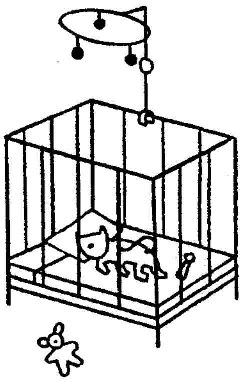
Avery Fisher Hall was the last stop on Brown's tour with Ani DiFranco and Gillian Welch, an Appalachian-style ballad singer from Los Angeles, whom DiFranco had also invited along. The show began with the three performers and their backup musicians playing several songs together, followed by solos and duets in various configurations. The audience reflected DiFranco's extraordinary popularity among in-your-face teen-age girls—magenta hair, tight T-shirts, patchouli. Combat-booted feet dangled from Avery Fisher's stately balconies.

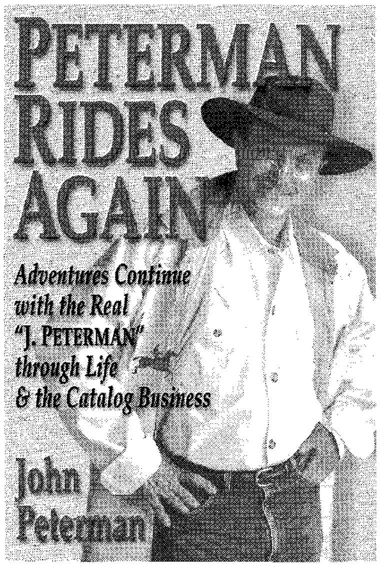
DiFranco belted and whispered her sweet, sharp verse from under a tight black halter top, her guitar hiding her bare midriff but not her front-to-back crotch zipper. Welch, whose songs are meant to sound like lost masters from a Depression-era Alan Lomax field trip, wore a plain, square Depression-era dress. And Brown, who feels more comfortable playing for a crowd of five hundred than to Avery Fisher's sold-out twenty-seven hundred, looked like a boy dressed up for church—he had on a loose-fitting tan suit, and took the jacket off mid-concert to reveal a sleeveless black T-shirt. Onstage with Ramsey, he sang a song called "Vivid," which he had written for DiFranco in response to "This Bouquet": "You gave me a living song / something I could understand." Brown also closed the show, with Little Willie John's "Fever," his basso backed up by DiFranco and Welch, who vamped back and forth across the stage in a strange, spontaneous dance.

After the performance, Welch snapped pictures on a digital camera while people streamed through the greenroom. Other shows on the tour had ended with long backstage jam sessions while the group waited for the stage to be broken down, but this was New York: the tour was over, and the bus was gone. Bo Ramsey, his eyes invisible under his cowboy hat, seemed not quite ready to head back to Iowa. He said, quietly, "Tonight's a real emotional deal."

The crowd thinned backstage, and someone suggested moving to a nearby bar. It was a warm, happy walk, with a full moon, and Ramsey and I ordered drinks and sat down in time to watch Brown arm wrestle with a young guy at the table. Brown evidently passed the time on the tour bus challenging people, or pairs of people, to arm-wrestling matches, and was undefeated. This time, he lost. A few minutes passed. Then Brown asked the kid, who had been gloating, "You want me to beat you?" They went at it again. Brown won.

DiFranco's husband, a dramatically bearded man referred to as Goatboy, came over, accompanied by a tall young woman with a bejewelled forehead who calls herself Bitch, and who is half of the acoustic duo Bitch and Animal. "It's quite a little folk family we have here,"





"They say there's a knitting factory in Balbriggan run by a young witch."

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DiFranco announced. "We've got Bitch, Animal, Goatboy. And when Greg's around we've got Old Man." Brown smiled into his whiskey. He and DiFranco started talking about parents. Onstage, DiFranco had joked that she would be much more afraid of Brown if she hadn't met his daughters. "But seeing you with them," she told him, "it just all slips away."

Brown plays fewer shows now than he used to, and, after another tour is over next month, he will take a year off. His youngest daughter will graduate from high school this spring, and he plans to spend time alone on the farm in Hacklebarney, which he inherited from his grandmother. He has added a barn, with room for a small recording studio, to the one-room cabin that stands there now. He has dug a pond. He plans to have a garden and a small orchard. "The touring has gone so well that part of me thinks, God, what a stupid time to quit," Brown told me recently. "But that's never stopped me before."

During his year off, Brown hopes to record an album of traditional folk songs, and maybe attempt part-sung, part-spoken poetry, with musical accompaniment. Last month, at a bookstore in Iowa City, he read a series of short prose pieces, "The Watsonville Sonata," published by a local printmaker friend. It was just bits of thought and memory—proto-songs—delivered in an even deeper voice than the one he sings in.

"I keep expecting writing to end," Brown told me. But when he was driving through Iowa last summer nine of the songs on "Over and Under" came to him fast, one after another, "like I was listening to the radio." He scribbled them down, unsure whether they were any good. In fact, they are some of his best. A banjo, fiddle, and harmonica thread through the songs, which talk plainly about getting older, looking back, and watching a younger generation inherit your world. If Brown's music has felt like a late-afternoon ride in his pickup truck, with the windows rolled down and the smell of corn and cut grass blowing in, then "Over and Under" is a late-night drive home. He's had a big dinner and a few drinks, and he feels like taking the back roads through the hills. The windows are still down, and it's starting to rain. ♦

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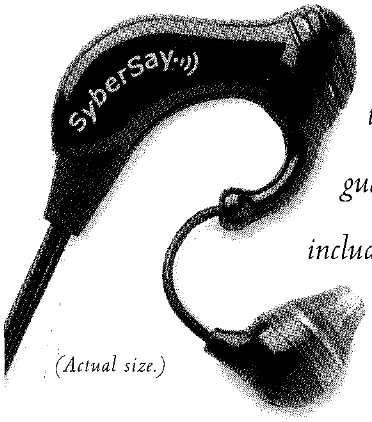

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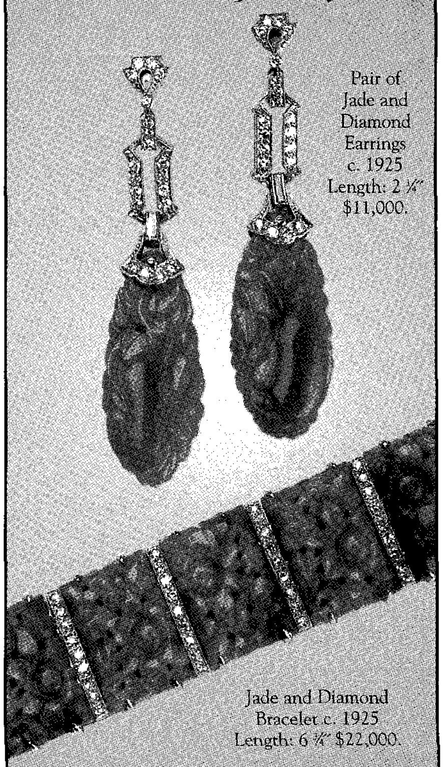

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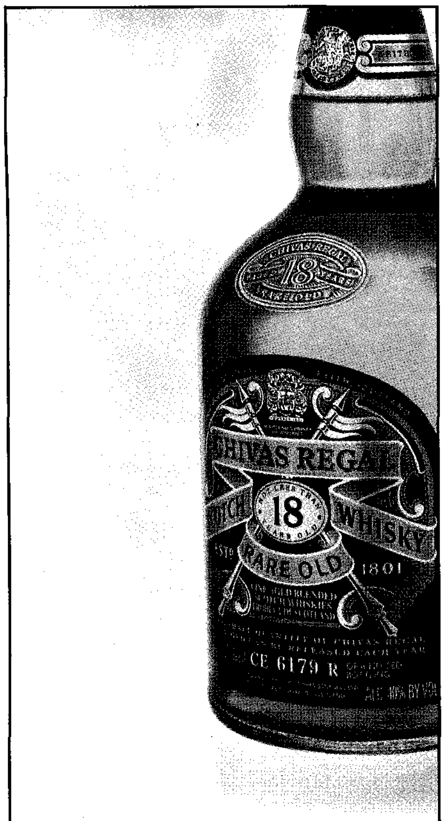

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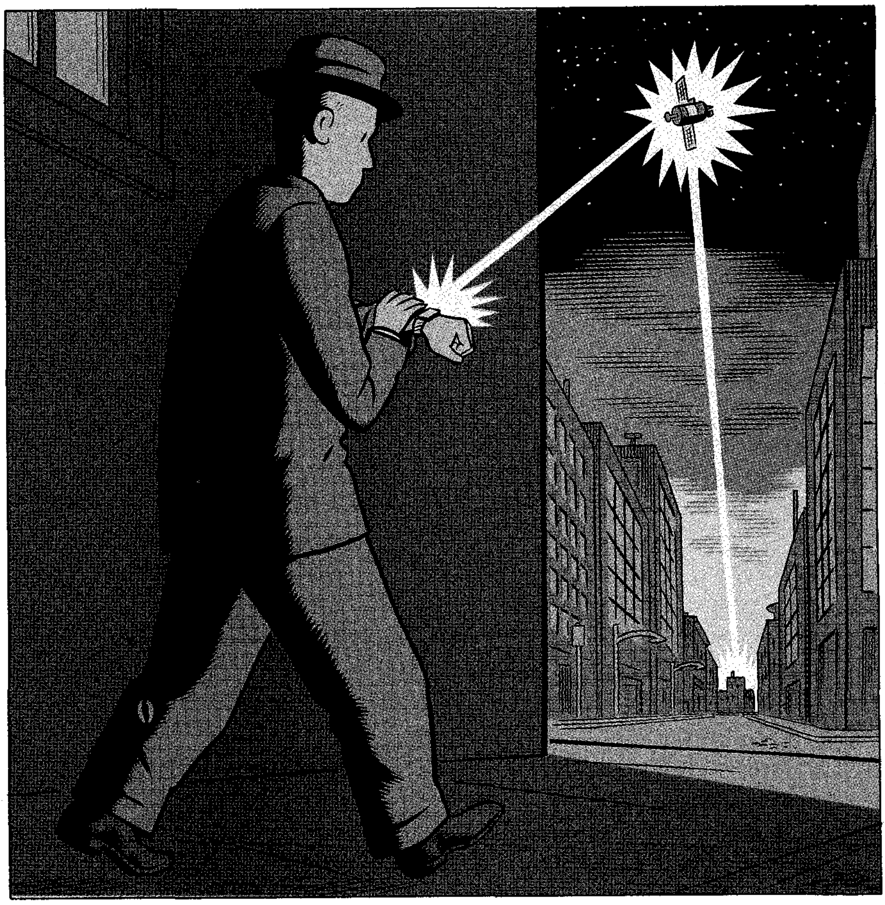
OUR FAR-FLUNG CORRESPONDENTS

NO PLACE TO HIDE

Why a satellite system may mean that we will never get lost again.

BY MICHAEL SPECTER



Soon every cell phone, watch, and laptop computer may come with a G.P.S. unit.

DAN CLOWES

I recently bought a compass that slips over the band of my wristwatch. It's the size of a dime, cost less than ten dollars, and was designed for people who ride mountain bikes into the wilderness. I don't own a mountain bike, but I do own many compasses. Right now, they are all lined up on my desk and pointing in the direction of the Vatican, just north of where I live. They work perfectly, and I find that comforting, although I am not sure why. Like many men I know, I am not very good about asking for directions, yet I rarely consult maps. Perhaps not surprisingly, I get lost almost everywhere I go.

As a reporter in Washington, I once got so mixed up as I raced off to cover a double homicide that I begged a taxi-driver to lead my car to the scene, just a couple of miles from my home. My family lived in Russia for several years during the nineties, and we had a dacha not far from Moscow. To get there required us to drive for forty minutes along a single well-travelled road; nonetheless, I managed, on several occasions, to steer in the general direction of Latvia.

All this came to mind a few weeks ago as I flew into Colorado Springs, a city that has quietly dislodged the North Pole as the most meaningful place on earth for the directionally impaired. Colorado Springs is the home of Schriever Air Force Base, where the 2nd Space Operations Squadron of the 50th Space Wing of the U.S. Air Force can be found. Its mission, with a little help from nearly a dozen cesium clocks and three hydrogen

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maser oscillators (which were created to test Einstein's theory of relativity), is to control the global positioning system, the largest constellation of military satellites that has ever orbited the Earth.

Twenty-four satellites, along with four spares, circle the planet twice each day. They move in six orbital planes, placing, in effect, a giant birdcage around the Earth, assuring that there will usually be eight satellites in range. The satellites send out a constant stream of radio signals that contain information about their orbit and speed, along with the exact time. That allows them to deliver precise location information to anyone who has a device that can receive the signals. The receiver works like a radio: to establish a location, one need only turn it on.

The satellites function as reference points—the way stars once did for mariners—and not since the twelfth century, when the compass came into use, has a navigational tool promised to more fundamentally alter the way we live. Within a few years, every cell phone, quartz watch, and laptop computer may come with a tiny G.P.S. receiver embedded in it. In fact, by December 31, 2002, federal law will require cellular carriers to be able to locate the position of every user making a 911 call. That should eventually make it possible for emergency personnel to find anyone in America who calls 911.

Though there are earthbound means of complying with the new "E911" mandate, many carriers will rely on G.P.S. technology. The National Park Service is already using G.P.S. to map trails, keep their snowplows on the road, and even track bears. Air routes routinely have a geographical tag and so do coastal waterways and shipping lanes. It is even possible to rig a driver's air bag so that, as it is deployed, it activates a G.P.S. device that reports the car's location to the nearest ambulance. Our children may never fully understand the word "lost"—just as few people under the age of ten have any idea what it means to "dial" a phone number.

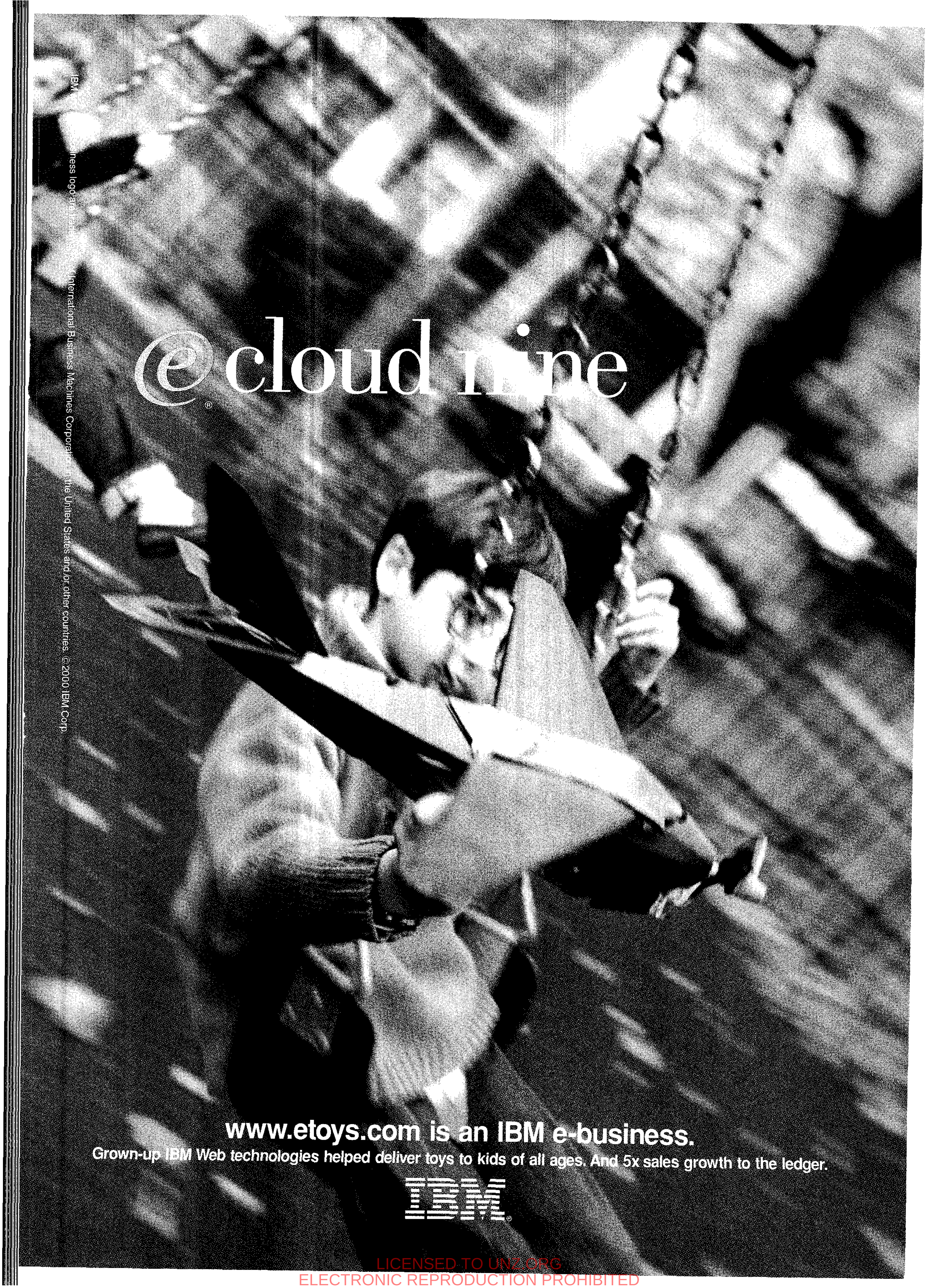
"Will you have a G.P.S. unit in your rental car?" Lieutenant Jeremy Eggers, the 50th Space Wing's press liaison, asked, reasonably enough, when I called from the airport in Dallas to tell him I was on my way. Although it is easy to rent a car with a G.P.S. receiver—places like Hertz add about six dollars a day to the cost and they provide voice narration that will tell you when and where to turn—I had forgotten to reserve one. Lieutenant Eggers sounded politely incredulous. Once again, I would have to navigate the back roads and scrubland of a place I had never been. I would have to look at that stupid compass on my watch and try to make sure I wasn't driving in the wrong direction. Lieutenant Eggers must have heard the distress in my voice. "This is a tricky place," he said. "The roads go on forever. People get lost all the time. Why don't I just meet you at your hotel and you can follow me out to the base?" Then he added, "Too bad, though. This is exactly what G.P.S. was invented for."

"Whose idea was this damn middle class?"

Originally, the global positioning system was not intended to help civilians at all. "The civils," as Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Jordan, the young commander of the 2nd Space Operations Squadron, calls them, came later. From the start, the system has been controlled by the United States military, which developed it soon after the Vietnam War. After years of watching soldiers become lost in dense jungles, the Defense Department wanted a space-based system to provide precise, three-dimensional position information that would also help its forces avoid detection. The Space Wing team guides the orbit patterns and provides all the data sent to every satellite. It also controls defense communications and the monitoring stations in Hawaii and the Kwajalein Atoll, in the Pacific Ocean; at Cape Canaveral; on Diego Garcia, in the Indian Ocean; and on Ascension Island, in the South Atlantic.

The first G.P.S. satellites were launched in 1978. In 1983, after Korean Air Lines Flight 007 was shot down by the Russian Air Force when it passed over the Kamchatka Peninsula—a Cold War disaster that might have been prevented if the crew had had access to better navigational tools—President Reagan decided to make the five-billion-dollar system available without charge to everyone in the world; that sent dozens of private companies scrambling into development. Still, G.P.S. didn't get its first great burst of public recognition until the Persian Gulf War, in 1991, when more than nine thousand handheld units were distributed to troops, letting them move about accurately in sandstorms, across the featureless desert, and at night. By the time the United States started bombing Serbia, in 1999, G.P.S.-guided weapons were allowing the military to attack targets accurately in adverse weather, and cheap commercial versions had become widely available.

Prices for G.P.S. circuits have fallen faster even than those for computer chips, and that has begun to transform a niche device into a common tool. For about a hundred dollars, you can find a G.P.S. unit that will tell you where you are almost anyplace on earth; the cheapest models are light enough to carry in a daypack, or even in a pocket. More complex systems come with color screens and detailed maps as full of facts as any atlas. Pi-



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I think I'll take up boxing and pop him one.
D. Reilly

lots of small planes can purchase "terrain avoidance systems" that combine G.P.S. data with topographical information to keep them from crashing into mountains. Archeologists and fishermen and farmers rely on G.P.S. units. Land surveyors have abandoned the plumb and pole for the new technology. One of Russia's biggest banks has placed G.P.S. transponders in its armored cars, so that dispatchers can track their progress along the potholed streets of Moscow.

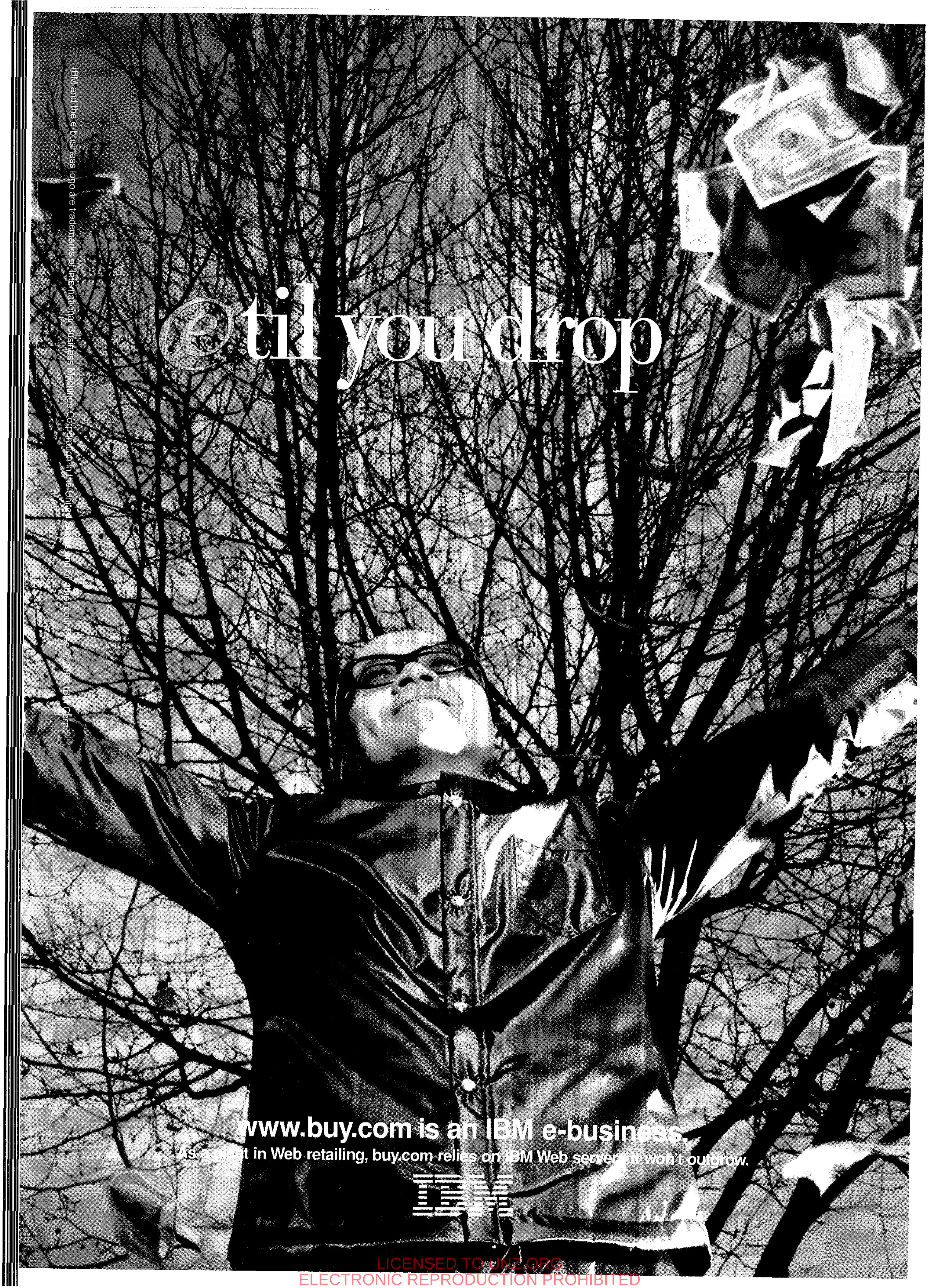
"I have been involved with G.P.S. since 1985," Matt Althouse, a space-systems analyst for the Scitor Corporation, an important technical consultant to the military, told me. "The first user set was up on a tripod with an omnidirectional antenna on top of it. It was about five feet tall and had a bunch of cables running to a big multichannel receiver, and it also had a tuner and a power generator. The whole thing cost three hundred thousand dollars. It was enormous. You look at that right now, at something comparable or better, and you can put it on your wrist. What cost three hundred thousand dollars fifteen years ago costs less than a hundred and fifty dollars now."

After G.P.S. was released to the public, military planners wanted to make sure that soldiers would receive more accurate signals than anyone else. So, in March of 1990, the government inserted subtle errors, or "noise," into the clock data that came from the satellites. Because the military wrote the codes, it knew how to compensate for the errors. The policy, called Selective Availability, was established to make sure that America's enemies would not be able to rely on G.P.S. to guide their weapons. It also meant that, while the Air Force could send missiles into windows in Baghdad, civilians would have to settle for signals good enough to let a helicopter find them on the top of a mountain. By this spring, however, researchers—not to mention foreign governments—had become so adept at using ground-based radio beacons to correct for the errors that the ten-year-old policy no longer held much value. On May 1st, President Clinton announced that the government would stop corrupting the signal. The change has already begun to have an immense impact on the industry, making devices more accurate and easier to use (and even cheaper: compensating for errors was expensive, requiring special software). Receivers that used to work to within a hundred metres are now accurate to under twenty—better than most topographical maps.

Lieutenant Colonel Jordan, who was dressed in a crisp blue flight suit, led me around the Master Control Station operations floor. To get there, authorized personnel must pass through the Entry Control Facility's booths, where they swipe their I.D. cards, are weighed, and enter a PIN number. Schriever Air Force Base sits like a lonely village in the flat plains east of Colorado Springs. "It's remote out here," Lieutenant Colonel Jordan told me. "You have to be committed. But we are. People get juiced from the work they do." They also get great technical training, Lieutenant Colonel Jordan added, and are regularly recruited by civilian firms.

He took me down a hallway painted in military beige, filled with signs admonishing people to be careful what they said. After walking by so many locked doors and warnings, I expected to find something out of "Fail Safe." Inside, though, it was a bit of a letdown. Apart from a model of the globe and the satellites that surround it, and the prominent "Top Secret" stickers attached to every computer monitor, "the pit"—as Lieutenant Colonel Jordan called the room—reminded me of a Citibank branch: it was big and blue, and had a large electronic Julian clock on the wall. About a dozen men were there when I visited—all of them clean-cut, inordinately polite, and young. It looked like the high-school science club.

Lieutenant Colonel Jordan asked me to sit at one of the monitors and introduced me to his crew, who were tracking the telemetry information that comes out of the satellites and making sure the solar arrays that power them were up and running. Every ten minutes or so, a new satellite would slide into range and the team would beam up coördinates. Lieutenant Colonel Jordan and his team explained that the computer in a G.P.S. receiver calculates its position by triangulation. To do that, the unit measures how long it takes for a radio message to travel from a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satellite. One satellite alone, however, won't do much good; it requires a minimum of three satellites, each one measuring my location from a different orbiting position, to tell me exactly where I am. Standing in the control room of the Space Wing, for example, I am eleven thousand miles from the nearest G.P.S. satellite. But I could be exactly the same distance from it if I were fishing in Siberia. "So you lock in a second satellite," Lieutenant Colonel Jordan explained, "one that is twelve thousand miles away." That would narrow my position to someplace in a circle covered by signals from those two satellites. But it's still a pretty big circle: I could be standing in the Space Wing or in front of the Sears Tower, in Chicago. That is why I would need a third signal, which would reduce the possible places I could be standing to two—one of which would be in outer space. A fourth satellite would allow me to determine my altitude. The more satellites in use, the more precise the information, and precision is essential: at the speed of light, clocks that are off by a billionth of a second would be accurate to within a foot; a thousandth of a second translates into nearly two hundred miles.

I asked one officer if he ever found such technical work dull. "Sir, I'm twenty-two years old and I am monitoring a system used by tens of millions of people," he replied. "The world is relying on us. So that is interesting to me." I nodded and started to walk away. Then he added, "We do other things here, you know, like watching for signs of the detonation of a nuclear device. That can be really useful, too."

I could see that G.P.S. would help people find their exits on the highway, and no doubt it will eventually make it less likely that my luggage will get lost. But calling it "a revolutionary tool of the digital world," as James Spohrer did when he described to me how ubiquitous G.P.S. would become, seemed a tad extravagant. Spohrer is a chief technical officer at I.B.M. and an eloquent advocate of the idea that once you have information attached to a specific place—once you put a geographical tag on nearly every spot on earth—the real world will start to get much more exciting.

Spohrer has written about a near future where it will be possible to walk into an unfamiliar airport, slip on a pair of glasses that contain a G.P.S. receiver, and watch as a virtual red carpet leads you to your gate. He is convinced that people will soon climb mountains and tour cities with devices that, connected to an earpiece or a handheld display, will tell them what they're seeing and how to find the nearest Chinese restaurant. Spohrer told me about an I.B.M. senior executive who has challenged his research team to develop a system that will use facial-recognition software, an earpiece, and, if needed, G.P.S. satellites, to whisper the name of any employee who walks by. "Sounds ridiculous, I know," Spohrer said. "Believe me, it's not. Devices that know where they are will soon be everywhere. And everything is going to know where it is. We are going to map every metre of this planet. And not just this planet, either."

I must not have looked convinced. "I'll tell you what to do," Spohrer said. "Go see Steve Feiner at Columbia University. Then let me know if you have any more questions."

One afternoon soon after that, I took the subway to 116th Street and Broadway and walked to the Computer Graphics and User Interfaces Laboratory at Columbia. Steven K. Feiner, a professor of computer science, is forty-eight years old and has slightly shaggy graying hair. His office looked as if it had been constructed as a set for a film about an absent-minded professor: laptops—whole and disassembled—digital cameras, special optics, and antique computer mice were everywhere. There were reprints of articles from the days when transistor radios were making news, and several bottles of Taittinger champagne sat on a table in the center of the room.

Feiner is Walter Mitty with a government grant. He works with technologies that take simple reality—such as basic information about where you live—add something to it, and make it richer. Feiner spends his time trying to blend G.P.S. computer graphics and wireless communication systems so that they all come together to enhance common experience. He asked me where I lived. When I told him Rome, he clapped his hands, leaped to his feet, and said, "Yes!"

He was silent for a moment; clearly, his mind had started to race. "You know," he began, "if you go to the Forum and look around, you quickly realize that the glory that was Rome is not amazingly well reflected in the strewn pieces of column parts and what is left standing. It's a fabulous ruin, of course, but if you want to know what it was like you have to buy those little books that have old photos of Rome overlaid with the columns and buildings etched in their original form. That's not enough for me. I would love to go there without having to look at the artist's rendition. I would like to put on a pair of glasses and literally look around and go back in time. I want to see the buildings exactly as they were, maybe with pieces from contemporary life thrown in. I want the chariots whizzing by and the giant throngs in the streets and the markets full of whatever they sold. I want the fantasy and I want it to stop only as they are getting ready to throw me to the lions."

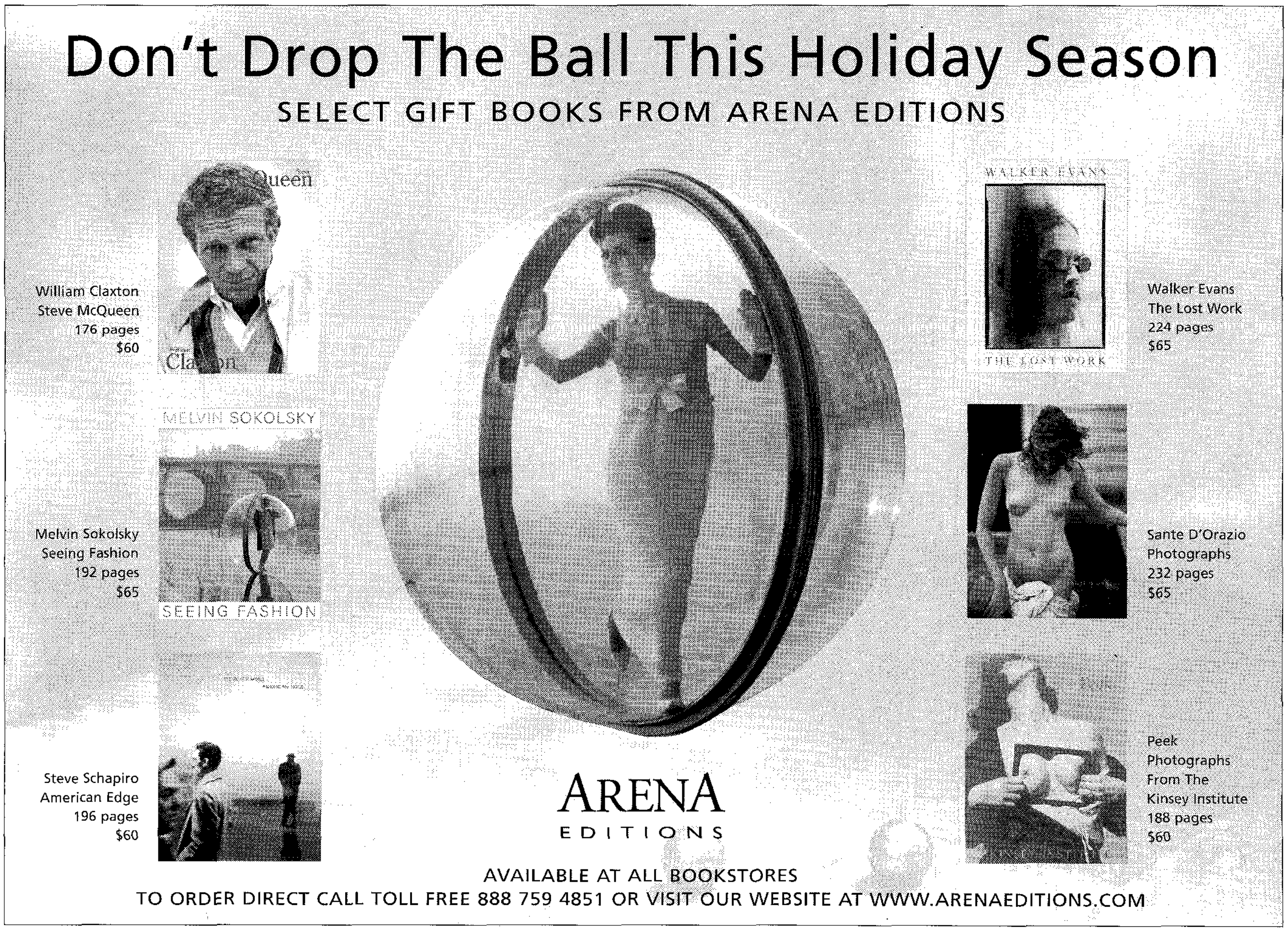
He sat down, and I wondered what this had to do with G.P.S. "As long as you can put a label on any physical object, on any building or monument or tree," Feiner explained, "you can take a pair of glasses with G.P.S. built in and with more sophisticated stuff which tracks the motion of your head. Those devices will know what you are looking at, so all you have to do is supply the software they need to tell you about it. That is what we are trying to do."

He picked up a pair of glasses with bluish anodized frames and small prisms embedded in the left lens. "We are not there yet," he said. "The system is heavy, it's unwieldy. I want it to be slick, like an MP3 player, and cheap. It's really just a question of time." Feiner led me across the hall, to his lab, where two of his graduate students were waiting with all sorts of gear. There were computer parts loaded onto a backpack, wall-sized monitors, and a large black device, resembling a stationary helicopter rotor, that helps track the movements of your head as you walk around a room.

"This work is based mostly upon the notion that there is someplace that you don't know but that you will be exploring," he said. "Maybe it's tourism or work or war, which is how we got into it. Much of my work is funded by the Office of Naval Research. It wants the marines and other soldiers to have all the right information: Where are the power lines? Where are the underground tunnels? Who might lie beneath the spot where I am standing, ready to blow me up? In essence, we are merging the physical world with the virtual world. We can label buildings with their names and show full-size 3-D models of underground tunnels as if they were being seen with X-ray vision."

Feiner has built a contraption that attempts to do all that. It consists mainly of the backpack computer—called "a real-time kinematic G.P.S."—which can pinpoint the location of a person to within several centimetres, and a visor that looks like a pair of good ski goggles. The first such system weighed forty pounds and the next one weighed thirty pounds. Now, with a computer powered by a seven-hundred-megahertz Pentium III chip, and a fast graphics card, it is down to twenty pounds.

As soon as I slipped on the headset, a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virtual version of the Columbia campus was projected onto my visor. As I glanced about, the gadget could tell which buildings I was looking at by monitoring the position of my head. Feiner loaded a documentary that he and some of his students had made, with the help of the journalism school, about the 1968 student uprising at Columbia, and through the visor I could watch film clips about some of those events, while standing exactly where they happened. Suddenly, when I looked off in the direction of Low Library, I heard the resonant voice of a narrator: "It was a sunny afternoon on Tuesday, April 23rd, in the spring of 1968. More than three hundred Columbia students marched to Morningside Park." As I turned my head to look at different buildings on the campus, Feiner's program presented film clips, sound guides, and bytes of history to go with whatever structure came into view.

The equipment may have been clunky and the images slightly cluttered, but it was hard to miss the point. "Today, if you go to a hotel, there will usually be a rack full of informational brochures—bus trips, museum guides, restaurant recommendations," Feiner said. "You can riffle through it to get some ideas of what to do. But, soon enough, it will all be in the chips. If you care about food, there will be different types of software; for antiques others. Pens and carpets and violins and wine will have distinct guides. It will be like the Internet. Whatever your interest is, somebody can attend to it.

"Falk maps are brilliant," he went on. "But they are on paper. I want the thing that does it all. Right now I am hungry. I am in Paris and I want to see all restaurants in the Nineteenth Arrondissement. Maybe it's a Monday. They need to be in close walking distance and open today. And do you know what? Instead of being told where they are, as I would in a guidebook, I want something to tell me how to get there, to just say, 'Turn left here and turn right there.' All I want is the directions. I certainly don't want to look like a tourist. No, I want to stroll confidently, like an arrogant Frenchman, in the direction of the restaurant. And someday I will."

There is a scene in the middle of "Mission: Impossible 2" when Tom Cruise injects a biometric chip containing a G.P.S. transponder into the ankle

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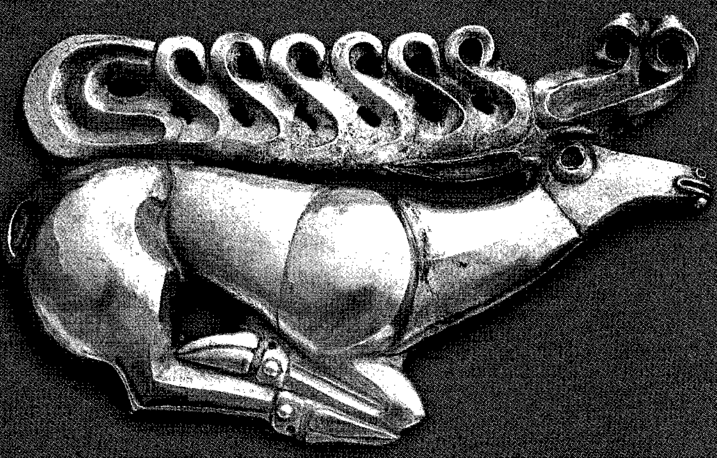

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Above: Shield emblem, Scythian, end of the seventh century B.C. State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation. Photo by Bruce White.

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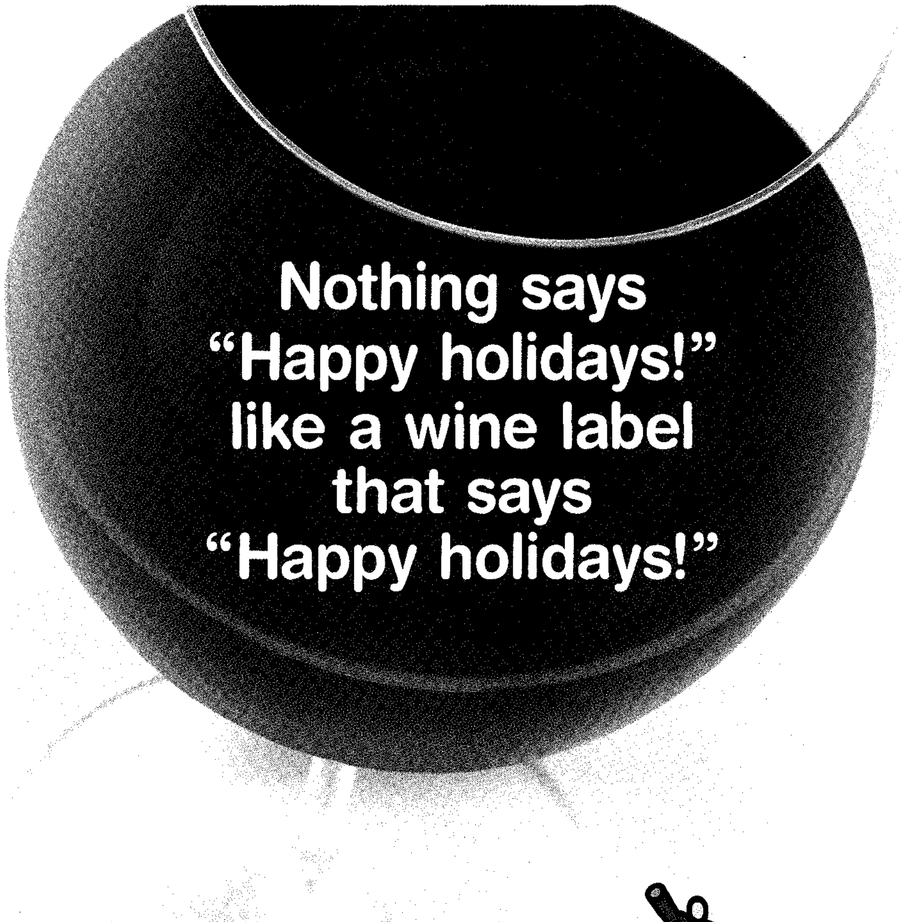
of his leading lady, Thandie Newton. He is then able to track her no matter where she goes. It seems like boilerplate science fiction, but the day before Halloween, at Cipriani 42nd Street—a former bank turned restaurant that is now a palace of Old World ambience—a company called Digital Angel.net did its best to prove that it was not. The company demonstrated its new product: a global tracking system that can be attached to a person. The device has a tiny antenna that captures not only one's location but also such data as pulse and temperature and transmits it to an Internet ground station.

Richard Sullivan, the chairman and chief executive officer of Applied Digital Solutions (which owns Digital Angel.net), told an audience of journalists and others (including Norman Mineta, the Secretary of Commerce) that the chips, which are about the size of a dime, would not actually be implanted in anyone. They were for "external use only," he said, adding, somewhat ominously, that anything else was "purely hypothetical at this time." Sullivan also showed a short video that suggested how the chip could be used to find lost children or kidnapped executives or people with Alzheimer's disease who have wandered away.

A live demonstration came next: Somebody named Steve was driving back and forth along a road near the Long Island Expressway. His position and body temperature were transmitted through a G.P.S. chip and wireless technology to East Forty-second Street, where they showed up on three big video screens. At one point, Steve held the G.P.S. chip next to the car air-conditioner. The temperature reading dropped instantly. In theory, the chip could be coated in Teflon or titanium and then placed inside a body—human or any other. Digital Angel.net recently merged with Destron Fearing, a company that specializes in tracking wildlife and domestic animals.

"This is all very profound," Charley Richardson, the director of the labor-extension program at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, told me when I called to talk about G.P.S. For years, Richardson has been concerned about unforeseen consequences of major new technologies, particularly for the labor force. "G.P.S. will change the workplace in definitive ways," he said. "Yet nobody even debates the value of that. It's something new, so we are just supposed to accept it. Right now you can drive down the Massachusetts Turnpike with a transponder in your car," he continued. "It signals to your account to deduct money for the toll when you drive through a booth. A G.P.S. transponder can do more, by informing the police where you are if you have an accident. But there is still more. It can also tell the police how fast you were driving. If you call in sick, should your boss be able to check your subway pass to see if you were travelling all over the city of New York? Are you ready for that? Because that's part of the revolution, too." ♦



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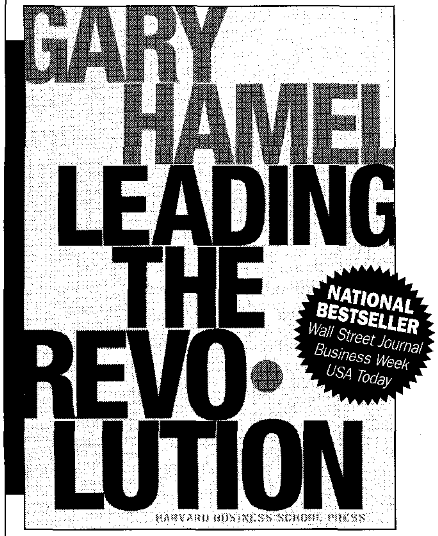

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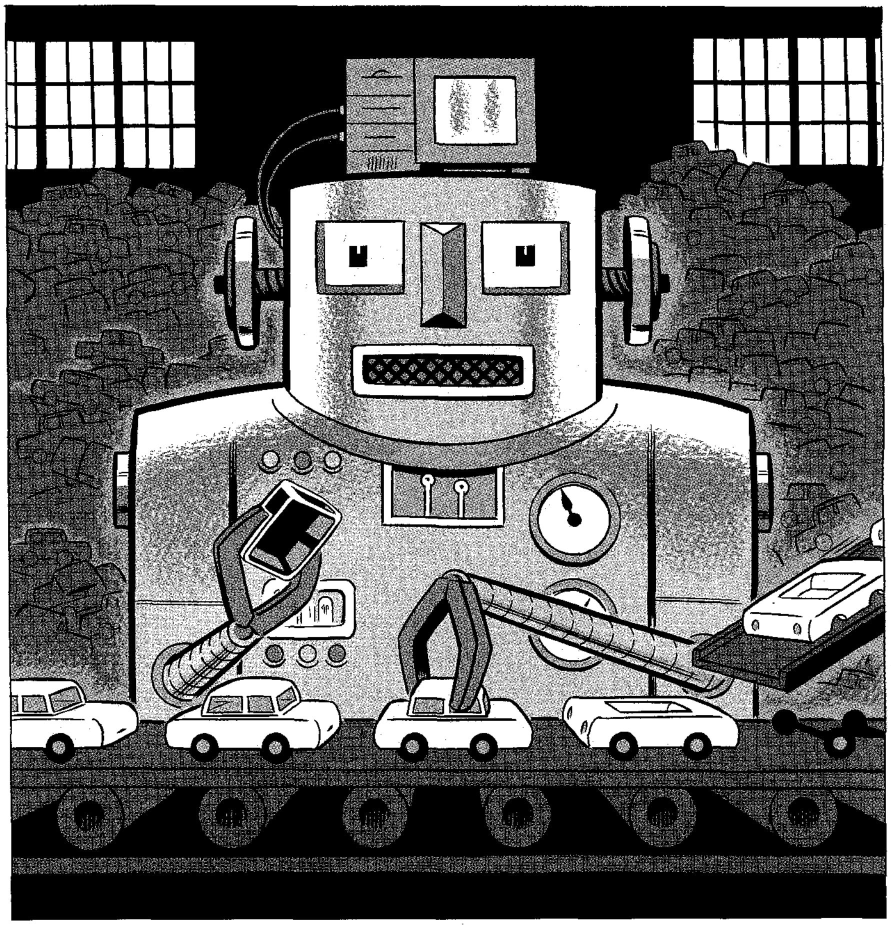
THE WORLD OF BUSINESS

THE PRODUCTIVITY MIRAGE

Are computers really that important?

BY JOHN CASSIDY

It is hard to pick up a business newspaper or magazine these days without coming across a reference to the "productivity miracle" that has reportedly taken place in the American economy during the past few years. Chief among the boosters, surprisingly enough, is Alan Greenspan, the normally lugubrious chairman of the Federal Reserve. In a recent speech to the National Governors' Association, Greenspan hailed the "remarkable changes" that are occurring in American business and traced them to the invention of the transistor, more than fifty years ago, which led to "the microprocessor, the computer, satellites, and the joining of laser and fiber-optic technologies." Innovations like these have created "an enormous new capacity to capture, analyze, and disseminate information," Greenspan went on. "Indeed, it is the proliferation of information technology throughout the economy that makes the current period appear so different from preceding decades." Other commentators have been equally rhapsodic about the wonders of the microchip, but Greenspan was more specific than most of them. "The major contribution of advances in information technology and their incorporation into the capital stock has been to reduce the number of worker hours required to produce the nation's output, our



If the New Economy is so much more efficient, people shouldn't be working so hard.

DAN CLOWES

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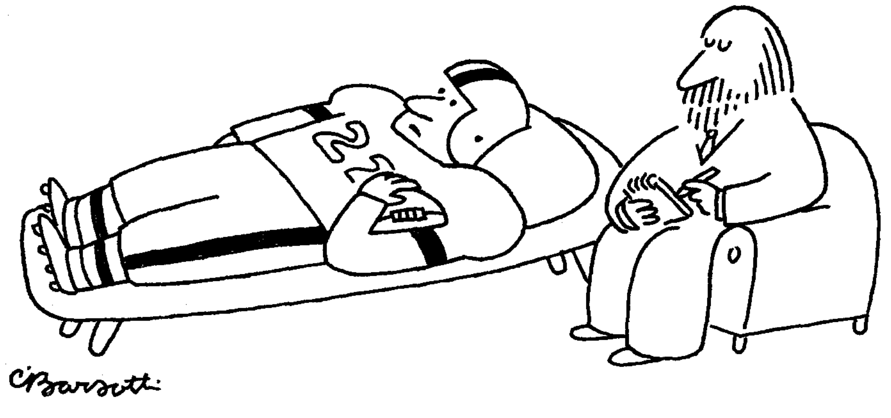
proxy for productivity growth," he argued.

If Greenspan is right, and productivity growth has taken a quantum leap, it is a truly historic development. Productivity is not just another humdrum financial statistic, like the inflation rate, yesterday's Nasdaq close, or the trade deficit. It is the key to raising living standards, paying for the aging of the baby boomers, and much else besides. When productivity grows steadily, as it did in the quarter century after the Second World War, workers' wages also increase steadily, and most people end up much better off than their parents. But when productivity growth stalls, as it did during the nineteen-seventies and nineteen-eighties, living standards stagnate, and upward mobility disappears.

At the moment, the future looks as if it will resemble the Eisenhower years more than it will the Carter era, but things always look good at the peak of a boom. In America during the nineteen-twenties, in Japan and Britain during the nineteen-eighties, and in Korea and Thailand during the nineteen-nineties, economists spied a New Economy, which, on each occasion, turned out to be a mirage. Our economic miracle may turn out to be equally chimerical. While Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and Larry Ellison have changed the way many people work, the scale of the transformation has been exaggerated. The fact that a typical office worker now has a computer linked to the Internet on his desk, instead of an ink blotter, doesn't necessarily mean he is any more productive.

Productivity growth may sound like an arcane economic concept, but it is actually pretty simple to grasp. If a baker works an eight-hour day and makes four hundred loaves of bread, which he sells to the public for a dollar each, his productivity is fifty dollars an hour. If he somehow manages to bake eight hundred loaves in the same workday, his productivity will double to a hundred dollars an hour. The same principles apply to business in general. The economy's productivity is calculated by tallying the value of the final goods and services produced in the country—the gross domestic product—and dividing this figure by the total number of hours worked in the business sector. If output grows faster than hours worked, productivity rises. If hours worked grow faster than output, productivity falls.

Greenspan's story comes in two parts: American workers are much more productive than they used to be; and the reason is the proliferation of information technology. The productivity figures from the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics seem to support the first part: they show strong growth in recent years. Between the second quarter of 1995 and the second quarter of this year, output per hour in the nonfarm business sector of the economy (the sector that economists usually look at) rose at an annual rate of 2.9 per cent, which is more than double the 1.4-per-cent annual growth between 1973 and 1995 and equal to the 2.9-per-cent annual growth between 1947 and 1973, a period that economists often refer to as a golden era in economic history. Now, 2.9 per cent may look like a small number, but the productivity debate is all about small numbers, which, thanks to the magic of compounding, translate into big differences over time. If productivity grows at an annual rate of 2.9 per cent, living standards double in twenty-four years, or one generation; at 1.4-per-cent productivity growth, living standards take almost fifty years, or two generations, to double.



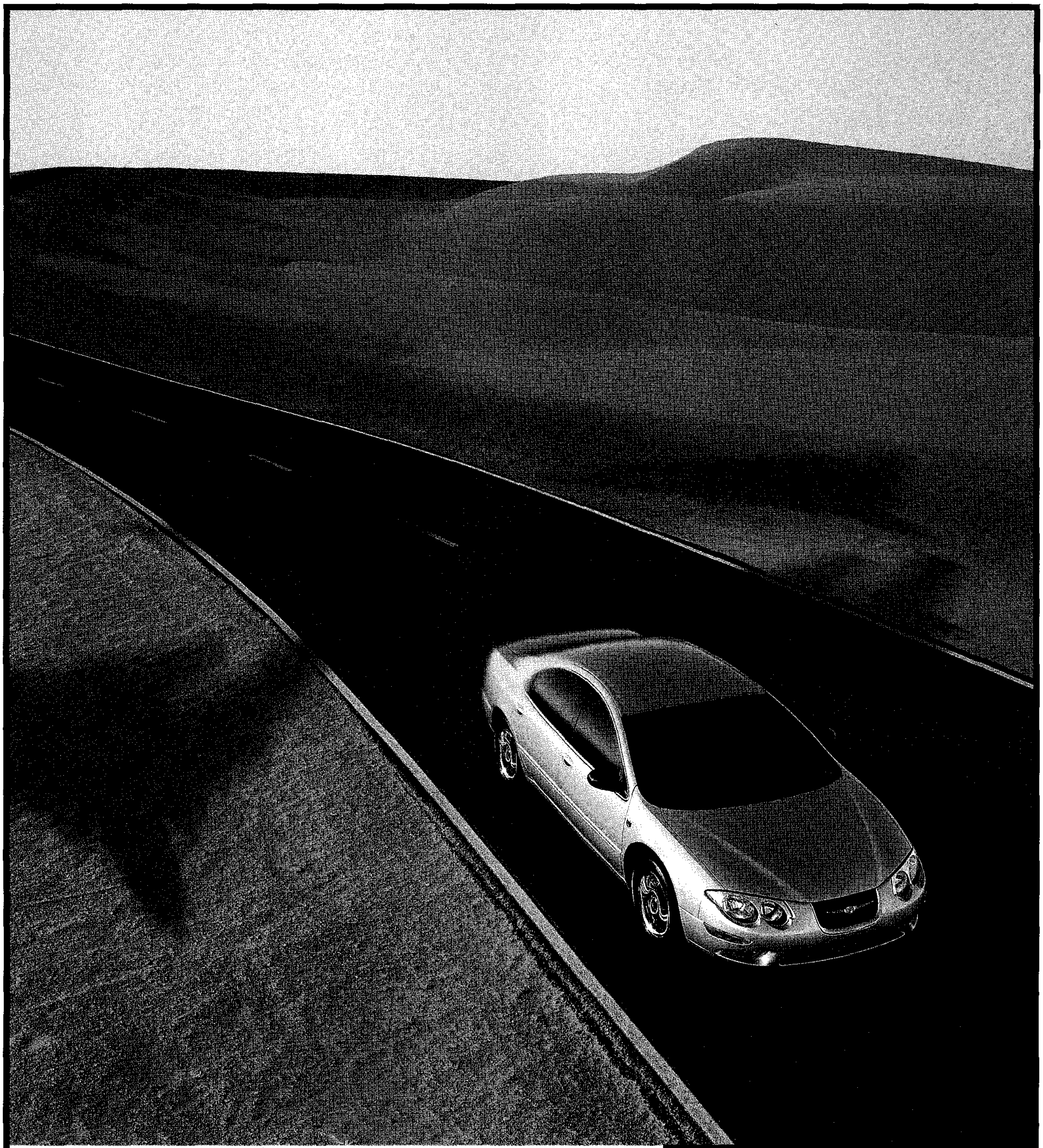
"Then I wake up, the cheering has stopped, I have three kids, and I work in a cubicle."

That is the good news, but it shouldn't be taken at face value. In every economic upswing, firms work their employees and machines more intensely; output surges; and productivity growth surges with it. When the economy slows, as it inevitably does at some point, workers and machines may be used less intensely; and productivity growth slips back. In the mid-nineteen-eighties, for example, output per hour rose just as rapidly as it has over the past few years, but the surge was cyclical, and it didn't last. At least some of the current productivity revival will prove to be equally temporary.

One way to get beyond short-term ups and downs is to look at trends across entire cycles, which include recessions as well as upswings. The last recession began in January, 1991, the month that the Gulf War started. Between then and now, output per hour has grown by about two per cent a year (a good deal less than the 2.9-per-cent annual growth since the middle of 1995). During the previous cycle, which began with the 1982 recession and ended in 1990, output per hour grew by 1.5 per cent a year. In comparing the two cycles, it appears that underlying productivity growth has risen by about 0.5 per cent a year. This is a significant increase, but it is hardly "remarkable."

There is another reason that the recent figures demand scrutiny: the government may be undercounting the number of hours people are working. For a baker's productivity to increase, he must make more loaves during his eight-hour shift, or the same number of loaves in a shorter workday. It doesn't count if he bakes more bread by working longer hours. The federal government says that the workweek has barely changed in ten years, but that seems dubious, especially as it applies to the two-thirds of the workforce that is employed in the service sector. Many of these workers, such as investment bankers, editors, and insurance salesmen, are not paid on an hourly basis; they receive an annual salary, or commission, and they organize their own schedules. With the aid of faxes, cell phones, and laptop computers, they can work at home, or on the road, as well as in the office.

"No one really knows how much work time is being put in the service sector," Stephen Roach, the chief econo-



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mist at Morgan Stanley Dean Witter, who has studied this issue, told me. “The Labor Department researchers ring up a firm’s human-resources department and ask how long a typical white-collar worker is working. The clerk checks the computerized time sheet, and it says thirty-five hours, forty hours, or whatever. I suspect it’s a good deal more than that, as the workplace has expanded to home offices, planes, trains, and foreign hotel rooms in the middle of the night.” If Roach is right—and Dora Costa, an M.I.T. economist, has unearthed some United States Census data that confirm that well-educated, upper-income Americans are working longer hours than they used to—then information technology is creating more work, not less; hundreds of millions of hours of work are going unrecorded by the government; and the productivity figures are biased upward.

Even if we assume that productivity growth has increased, how much credit should go to computers and the Internet? The economic importance of on-line retailing, satellite communications, and other digital wonders is often exaggerated. In 1998, the last year for which figures are available, the total value of the Internet economy, including investments in the network’s infrastructure, subscriptions to Internet service providers, and on-line commerce of all descriptions, came to less than a fiftieth of the gross domestic product. It may be almost 2001, but the majority of businesses still have little or nothing to do with the Internet.

What the boom has seen is a big increase in capital spending. Consider the baker in his shop. One way for him to raise his output per hour is to come up with a recipe for bread that bakes more quickly, but that isn’t easy. Another way is to buy a bigger oven so that he can bake more loaves at the same time. In the past decade, American firms have been following the second tack, buying machinery at a rate rarely seen before. During the nineteen-nineties, business investment in plant and equipment of all kinds almost doubled—from $626 billion in 1990 to $1.2 trillion in 1999—with much of the increase going to information technology. Last year alone, businesses and government agencies spent a total of $433 billion on computers and information processing. Two recent studies—one by Dale W. Jorgenson, of Harvard, and Kevin J. Stiroh, of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, the other by Stephen D. Oliner and Daniel E. Sichel, who work at the Federal Reserve Board, in Washington—attribute about half of the post-1995 acceleration in productivity growth to the fact that firms have provided their employees with better equipment, much of it information-processing equipment.

These studies imply that all the money spent on information technology was not wasted, but they offer no encouragement for those who believe that we are witnessing something radically new. It turns out that computers and fibre-optic cables are just like mechanical diggers and bakers’ ovens. When firms buy a lot of them, a process economists call “capital deepening,” their workers’ productivity increases. But when firms cut back on investment spending, as they have begun to do in the past few months, this form of productivity growth will eventually decline.

Greenspan doesn’t agree that information technology is just another form of capital. He believes that, by reducing the amount of uncertainty in the economy, it has revolutionized the way firms do business. “Information technology raises output per hour in the total economy principally by reducing hours worked on activities needed to guard productive processes against the unknown and the unanticipated,” he argued in a recent speech.

To translate Greenspan’s theory into the world of baking, think of a large bread company that owns many individual bakeries. Before the dawn of the information age, such a business would have had only a vague idea of how many loaves its customers might demand on any given day. To protect against unexpected surges in demand, it would have kept extra bakeries open, with extra ovens, flour, and workers on hand. Some of the bread produced in these bakeries would have gone to waste, but that was the price of keeping customers satisfied. The microchip did away with this world. Thanks to retail bar codes, the bread company can track every loaf it sells; by monitoring its retail Web site, it can see how much bread its biggest customers, such as restaurants and supermarkets, will need tomorrow; and by installing global-positioning satellites in its deliv-

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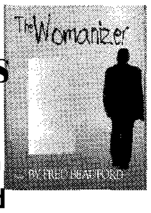
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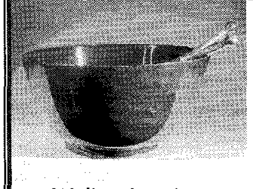
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Greenspan's theory is clever, but it doesn't fit all the facts. The strongest evidence in its favor is a surge in something called "multifactor productivity," which is a measure of workers' efficiency after allowing for improvements in the equipment they are using. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, between 1995 and 1998 the annual rate of multifactor-productivity growth more than doubled compared with the growth rate during the previous five years. This was a sharp increase, undoubtedly, but multifactor productivity always rises in a boom, and it is unclear how much of the upturn is permanent.

If Greenspan is right, moreover, the industries that make the greatest use of information technology should have enjoyed the most rapid rises in productivity. This hasn't happened. As Jorgenson and Stiroh report, "the empirical record provides little support for the 'new economy' picture of spillovers cascading from information technology producers onto users of this technology." About four-fifths of total business spending on information technology takes place in just three industries: wholesale and retail trade; finance, insurance, and real estate; and business services. These are all industries in which productivity growth has lagged for years. In commercial banking, for example, the rate of productivity growth actually fell between 1995 and 1998 compared with the previous five years, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Facts like these raise a tricky question: Just how useful are computers? Undeniably, it is a marvel that, for less than two thousand dollars, I can buy a box containing more computing power than the I.B.M. mainframe that NASA used to

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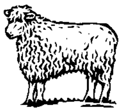

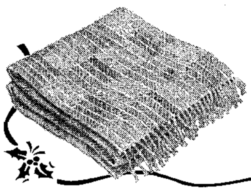

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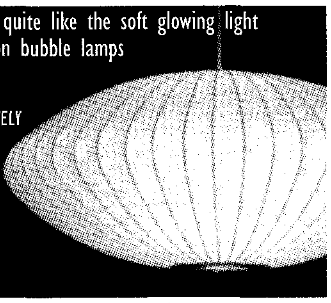

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"The nurses and technicians did all they could—I just wasn't into it."

land Apollo 11 on the moon. The issue is, what can I use all this memory and processor speed to accomplish, since I don't have a spacecraft to navigate? Write this article? I did that. But I could have done it fifteen years ago on my first computer, an I.B.M. XT that ran at about five megahertz and had a flashing green cursor. In some ways, the old XT was faster than my spiffy new Apple Cube, because the software it used was much simpler. Surf the Internet? I did that, too, to research some of the material for this article. It was much quicker than going to the library or calling people and asking them to send me their articles. While I was on the Net, though, I also spent a good deal of time checking out the English soccer scores and E-mailing my friends and family, neither of which helped me finish the piece faster.

True, many people are less easily distracted than I am, but, even if they confine their computer use to job-related tasks, they don't necessarily become more productive, as a host of studies has shown. Take the simple task of writing business letters. A study of I.B.M. workers found that letters that were handwritten or typed were modified, on average, eight times. Letters produced on a word processor were modified, on average, forty-one times, but with no discernible difference in quality. Or consider the wealth of business information available at the touch of a mouse, something that Greenspan identifies as a major benefit of the computer revolution. Does it really allow firms to operate more efficiently? Thomas K. Landauer, a former researcher at Bell Labs who has spent twenty years studying the impact of computers, hardly thinks so. "Once a computer is in place and all of a company's inventory, sales and expense data are available for electronic access and manipulation, the opportunities for analysis are dizzying," he wrote in his book "The Trouble with Computers." He continued, "Every manager now gets reports measured in stack-feet per month. Nobody can read it all or digest what they've read." Landauer's grim conclusion: "We expected computers to bring across-the-board productivity help, work efficiency improvements for small and large alike. This they have not delivered."

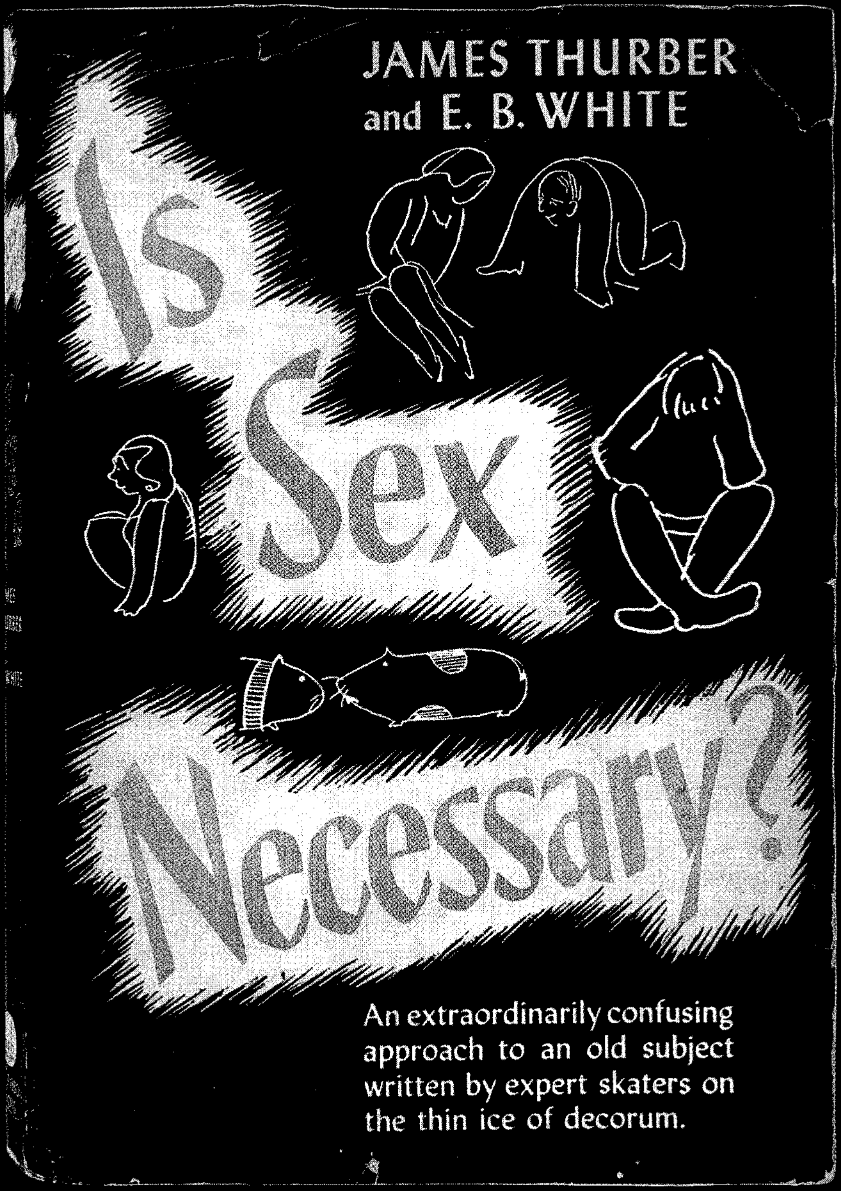
The most dramatic increases in productivity have been in manufacturing, but Greenspan's theory doesn't really hold up there, either. In aircraft assembly, the car industry, and many other businesses, the "just in time" production techniques that he is referring to were widely adopted before productivity growth took off in 1995. They were invented by Japanese firms, such as Toyota and Mitsubishi, during the nineteen-seventies. Starting in the early eighties, American firms, such as General Motors and Boeing, copied their Japanese rivals slavishly. The resulting changes certainly boosted the productivity of American industry, but they had as much to do with encouraging teamwork and flexibility among the workers as with information technology.

Some manufacturers have invested heavily in information technology but have seen little or no increase in productivity. The newspaper industry is a good example. In the past decade or so, laptop computers, faxes, and the Internet have revolutionized news gathering, and satellite technology has transformed the printing and distribution side of the business. It's hard to believe that these changes wouldn't have made people working in newspapers more efficient, but they haven't. Between 1987 and 1997, the latest period for which the Bureau of Labor Statistics has figures, productivity in the newspaper industry fell by 2.3 per cent a year.

There is one manufacturing business in which digital technology has certainly boosted the reported rate of productivity growth: the computer industry itself. The most startling fact about the apparent productivity revival, rarely mentioned by Greenspan and other optimists, is the extent to which it has been concentrated in firms that *produce* information technology, rather than in firms that *use* information technology. Between 1995 and 1997, for example, workers at computer manufacturers, such as Dell and Compaq, raised their productivity at an annual rate of 41.3 per cent. Workers at firms that make electronic components and accessories, such as Cisco Systems, increased their productivity by 23.3 per cent a year.

The computer sector, which includes computers, peripherals, and software, generates about a thirtieth of the gross domestic product, but it has accounted for roughly a third of economy-wide productivity growth in recent years, according to Michael Harper, an economist at the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Some

October 5, 1980. Lost at the beginning of one midlife crisis.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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mischievous economists go further than Harper and attribute virtually all the productivity revival to the computer industry. Robert J. Gordon, of Northwestern University, reckons that, after allowing for the effects of the economic cycle, almost nine-tenths of the economy has seen no increase in multifactor-productivity growth since 1995. Other economists have challenged how Gordon arrived at this conclusion, but his main point stands: productivity growth has been heavily based in the technology sector.

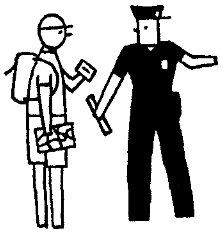
In view of this, it is surprising that more attention hasn't been paid to the unusual way in which the government values the output of the computer industry, and the impact this has on productivity statistics. In 1999, final sales of computers came to $92.5 billion. This is a straightforward figure—firms, households, and government departments paid this much money for computers. But the Commerce Department didn't use $92.5 billion when it was reporting real G.D.P.; it used $245.9 billion. As a result, final sales of computers increased by 47.2 per cent over the previous year instead of 6.3 per cent. The difference arose because of a controversial statistical technique, "hedonic pricing," which adjusted the raw dollar figure for the fact that computers are constantly improving in power and quality.

The details of hedonic pricing are complicated, but the idea behind it isn't: quality improvements are worth something even if they aren't reflected in a good's price, so they should be included in the official statistics. Consider, for example, the workers at Compaq whose job is to assemble a typical two-thousand-dollar personal computer. Five years ago, such a computer might have featured a central-processing chip running at a hundred megahertz, with a one-gigabyte hard drive. Today, a typical two-thousand-dollar computer could well have a processor running at eight hundred megahertz, with a twenty-gigabyte hard drive. The statisticians at the Commerce Department argue that Compaq's workers are creating more value in the new computer, even though its price is the same as the old one. To allow for this, they increase the value of the new computer in the real G.D.P. (A similar method is used to adjust the output of the software industry upward.) This massaging makes the concept of "output" very slippery. It is as if the Commerce Department had decided that, because bread is more nourishing than it used to be, every two loaves the baker sells should be counted as three.

It isn't easy to tell how much impact hedonic pricing has on the over-all productivity statistics—Gene Epstein, of *Barron's*, and James Grant, of *Grant's Interest Rate Observer*, have been arguing about this for months—but, in a debate that hangs on one or two percentage points, the question isn't immaterial. Between 1995 and 1999, the high-technology sector accounted for about a quarter of the annual growth in G.D.P. (0.9 per cent of 3.8 per cent), according to J. Steven Landefeld, the director of the Commerce Department's Bureau of Economic Analysis. If a third of this contribution is attributable to hedonic pricing, which Landefeld says is a reasonable guess, hedonic pricing has boosted productivity growth by about 0.4 per cent a year, or about a seventh of the total.

It is also worth noting that other industrialized countries, such as Germany and Britain, don't use hedonic pricing for computers, and this is one reason that their economies appear to lag behind the United States' economy. The Bundesbank, Germany's central bank, recently recalculated German spending on information technology since 1991 using American methods. The old calculations showed spending growing by a niggardly six per cent a year. When the bank used hedonic pricing, the figure leaped to twenty-seven and a half per cent a year. Britain's Office for National Statistics carried out a similar exercise and found a similar result: introducing hedonic pricing for computers appeared to triple the growth rate of the British manufacturing industry during the past four years.

Carlyle, when he coined the term "dismal science," in the mid-nineteenth century, wasn't making a pejorative statement; he was merely reflecting the chronic pessimism of classical economists such as Thomas Malthus. The current boom has turned many of Malthus's successors into optimists, which is hardly surprising, given that virtually every economic indicator is at or near record levels. But, in the end, numbers, however detailed, can tell us only so much. If the economy were vastly more productive than it used to be, we would be able to tell simply by looking around. Fewer worker hours would be needed to produce the goods and services—from cars to jeans to haircuts—that make up the G.D.P., so most people would have more time on their hands. This is the future that Keynes, an economist who wasn't dismal in any sense, wrote about seventy years ago in his famous essay "The Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren." In Keynes's vision, technological progress would have advanced to such an extent that ordinary folk would be able to spend most of their time at leisure, reading books and cultivating their interest in the arts. (The Cambridge don, who married a Russian ballet dancer and spent his own spare time re-reading the Greek classics, had a quaint view of humanity, it must be said.) Instead, more people are working than ever before, and they are working longer hours, or so it seems.



In January of 1990, roughly a hundred and nineteen million people were working (legally) in the American economy. By October of this year, the number had risen to about a hundred and thirty-five million. Some of the sixteen million new workers are recent immigrants and youngsters, but many of them are people who used to be outside the labor force, such as retirees, disabled individuals, and former welfare recipients who had given up on trying to get jobs. About nine million of the new workers are women. More working-age women are employed than ever before—57.7 per cent of them, compared with 54.6 per cent a decade ago.

These statistics bear thinking about. Alan Greenspan, were he to present an accurate picture of the current boom, would have to add the advent of child care to the invention of the transistor as a major precipitating factor. The image of a tired woman rushing home from work to cook for her kids is not the one most people call to mind when they think about twenty-first-century capitalism, but it is just as much a part of the New Economy as any productivity miracle. ◆

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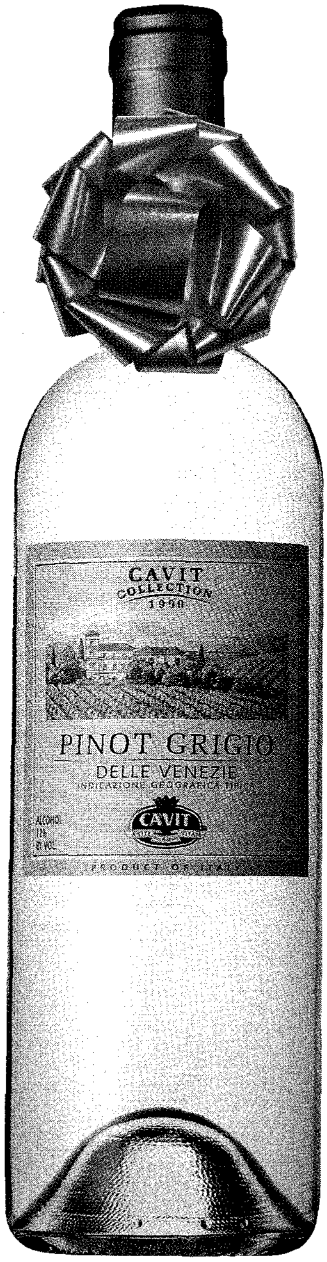

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PERSONAL HISTORY

MY FAKE JOB

One day, he showed up for work at an Internet firm. So what if no one had hired him?

BY RODNEY ROTHMAN

I don't smoke, but I still take a cigarette break every day at four o'clock. I stand there and let the cigarette burn down. I pretend to inhale, lightly, so I don't trigger a coughing fit. The office smokers never notice; they're too busy complaining about their newly worthless stock options, or how the latest reorg left them with a job title they don't even understand, like "resource manager." I never speak up, because there is a crucial difference between my colleagues and me: I was never hired to work at this company.

I don't have stock options here. I don't have a job title here. *I don't have a job here.* A few weeks ago, I just walked into the office.

It was the first Internet office I'd ever seen. It takes up five floors of an old warehouse in downtown Manhattan's Silicon Alley. No one stopped me when I came in. The sense of transience was overpowering. Hundreds of employees worked at identical workstations. They sat in thousand-dollar ergonomic office chairs, but their nameplates were made with paper and Magic Marker. The message was clear: the chairs could be resold; the employees were expendable.

Twenty-five-year-olds in T-shirts and cutoff fatigues pinballed from computer monitor to coffee machine, staring at their feet. Scattered desks were unoccupied because of April's Nasdaq implosion. It struck me that somebody could easily just start showing up for work at this office. Sitting at an empty desk, minding his own business, he would never be noticed.

Day 1, 10:30 A.M.: I recently left a sixty-hour-a-week job so I could have more free time and do freelance writing. It hasn't been going well. I have no free time, because I'm always trying to write. I get no writing done, because I'm always wasting time. What counts as wasting time? How about dozing off midday while reading *InStyle*? How about spending six hours deciding how best to spend six hours?

The building's lobby is a gray expanse of faux marble, sucking up daylight. There's no security guard. A small group of people wait for the elevator and sip iced coffee. Standing among them, I feel like a C.I.A. operative, albeit one who scares easily and is wearing Teva sandals.

I spent the early part of the morning concocting a false identity. I decided that I had just been transferred from the company's satellite office in Chicago (I'd read about it on the Web site). Then I selected a fake job title. The more I thought about it, the more I liked the sound of "junior project manager." It seemed vague, perfect for flying under the radar.

The elevator empties into an airy loft, filled with desks. In front of me, a young receptionist is talking on the telephone. I try to look distracted, as if I were junior-managing a project deep inside my mind. I see her staring at me, but her face registers no concern. She turns back to her phone conversation, and I walk in undisturbed.

I have no idea where to go. I follow everyone down a hallway and into a bustling kitchenette. The kitchenette is spacious and revolves around a large common table that nobody sits at. There is a communal refrigerator stocked with a dozen brands of soft drink, but I take a sodium-free seltzer. I have never, ever liked seltzer. Everyone loads up on caffeine and moves on. People clutch mugs that say "Omnitech" or "Digitalgroup.com," instead of those "You Want It When?" Dogbert ones.

I drift freely around the office. It's like a campaign headquarters without buttons. The workstations are low to the ground and clustered in fours. Everyone is on the phone. I see a man in his forties with bare feet up on his desk. I see nose studs. Nobody looks at me twice. After a few laps around the office, I decide I've worked hard enough for today. As I walk out, I turn to the receptionist and say, "See you tomorrow."

DAN CLOWES

Day 2, 10:50 A.M.: There is a different receptionist today, and I walk by her too quickly to notice anything interesting. Everything feels different today, in a bad way. Back in the kitchenette, I take another repulsive sodium-free seltzer. It's now part of my office routine. Then I see a sign-up sheet posted on a bulletin board: "FEELING STRESSED? JOIN US FOR LUNCHTIME YOGA!"

It's too much to resist. I sign "Mike Kramer." As I finish, I realize someone is behind me, looking over my shoulder. "You don't have to sign up, you know," she says. "Only, like, four of us go."

I turn around. She's pretty, of course, even in harsh fluorescent lighting. The collar of her blouse is charmingly askew. I briefly imagine us doing "downward dog pose" on adjacent mats. Her name is Katie. (Actual names have been changed.) "Are you new here?" she asks.

"I've been here a week," I say. "I transferred from the Chicago satellite office."

I realize that employees my age probably don't use bland corporate-speak like "satellite office." "I'm a junior project manager," I add.

"Really?" she says. "I'm a project manager. What projects do you work on?"

It occurs to me now that I could have been more prepared. Perhaps I could have *learned what this company does.*

"I'm still finishing up Chicago projects." I begin shifting from foot to foot. Katie asks me where I live, and I tell her, "Downtown, with friends."

"No," she laughs, "where do you live *here*?"

"I, uh, don't have a desk yet," says the brilliant junior project manager, having worked for a week in an office with fifty empty desks.

Day 2, 10:53 A.M.: I introduce myself to the receptionist. My thinking is that if I get her on my side I'll be able to come and go as I please. Her name is Donna. "Nice to meet you, Donna," I say. "I'm Rodney Rothman." I immediately realize my mistake and panic. I've been here for three minutes and I've managed to establish two separate false identities, one of which is technically my real identity.

"Rodney, have you met Lisa yet?" she asks, motioning to a sturdy woman in a cardigan chatting ten feet away from us.

"Yes," I lie.

"Good. So you got an I.D. card?"

"Yes," I lie.

"Good. You'll need that after six." Donna's phone is ringing, and she's not picking it up.

"Do you have an extension yet?"

"They haven't given me one."

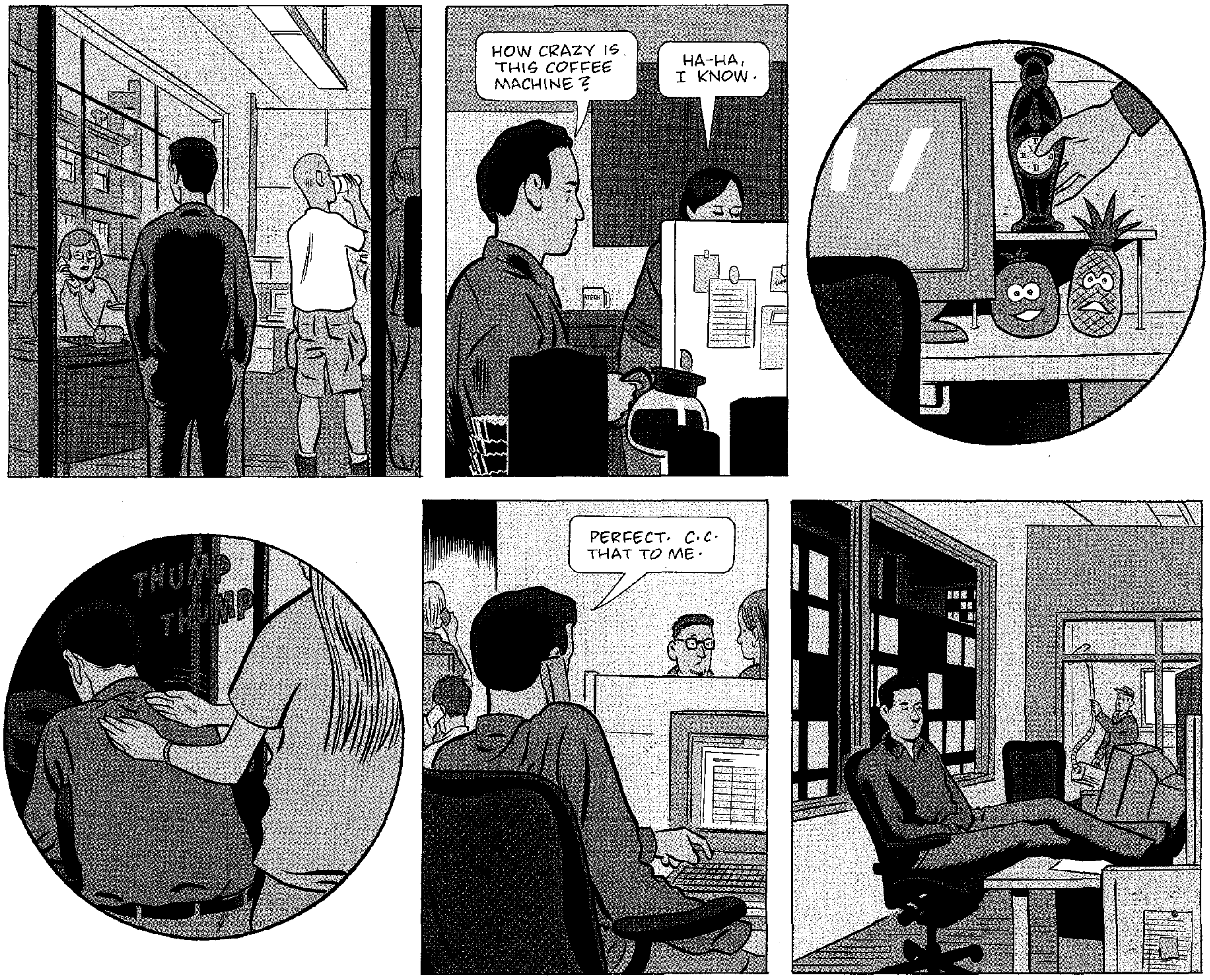
"And that's R-o-d-n-e-y?"

"Actually . . . it's Randy."

"Randy Rothman?"

"Ronfman. R-o-n-f."

Donna writes my name down on a


HOW CRAZY IS THIS COFFEE MACHINE?
HA-HA, I KNOW.
THUMP
THUMP
PERFECT. C.C. THAT TO ME.

Free massages, free beverages, companionship, E-mail access: the perfect job, perfectly undisturbed by having a job.

pad of paper. Donna's phone is ringing. She's not picking it up. *Pick it up. Pick it up.* Donna extends her hand toward my sweaty palm. "Welcome to the office, Randy."

DAY 3: "Randy" is taking a much needed personal day from fake work. I'm at an afternoon Yankee game with my friend Jay. Like many of my friends, Jay can't believe I'm really doing this; he regards me with a mixture of awe and concern. Jay was recently let go by an Internet startup. In between pitches and beers, he explains things like production tools and C++. Jay tells me that some of his former colleagues are continuing to go to work, even though they're not getting paid anymore.

Last night, I checked out Web sites for some of the hundreds of Web consulting companies like mine. I learned about maximizing my knowledge system. I boned up on branding, decision support, and integrated E-solution deployment. Now, as I watch Tino Martinez take batting practice, I relate to his work ethic. We are strivers. We are brothers. We are improving our skill sets.

DAY 4, 7 P.M.: I ride up in the elevator with a tiny West Indian security guard in a heavy wool uniform. I'd like to see him try to wrestle me to the ground. I remember too late that the office is locked after six, but it doesn't matter. The guard swipes his own card and *holds the door open for me.*

I've always liked offices during the fringe hours, early morning and in the evening. It's liberating to spend peaceful time in a place that's normally frantic. To me, the sound of a night cleaning crew is like a rolling country stream.

The office is quiet and freshly mopped. I walk around and shop for my desk. It's hard to tell which desks are unoccupied. Some people refrain entirely from decorating their workspace. That way, they can pack up and leave quickly when the axe comes down. Other desks are decorated lavishly, although I can think of harsher words to describe a green plastic M&M playing a trumpet.

I hop from desk to desk. I sit in each chair, maximizing, deploying, wanting it to feel right. I finally select a desk at the end of a large room with thirty workstations. It's well situated, facing the entire room, with nobody in back of me. It has an operational computer, perfect for taking notes. I put my feet up and close my eyes, thinking of rolling country streams.

DAY 5, 10 A.M.: There's no seltzer in the kitchenette this morning. I have to take a Fresca, a beverage I loathe. It's a bad omen, considering what I have to do: sit down at my new workstation in front of an office full of employees.

I'm purposeful as I steam through the place, steering around bodies and desks. Nobody looks up. I reach my chair and sit down. I wait. I let out a loud sigh. I scan the room. Everyone is typing or on the phone. Two women in their early twenties huddle at a desk, eating breakfast and talking: "But what if I worked six hours on one, three on the other. . . . I don't know, that's just what *they* told me to do."

Whoever *they* are, I don't see them. Nobody acknowledges me. The office has swallowed me up without a burp.

DAY 5, NOON: The phone rings. My imagination gets the better of me. I picture a squadron of security guards mobilizing upstairs. A.T.F. agents clamber through air ducts, closing off my available exits. I wonder whether Teva sandals would cushion a twelve-story fall. I answer the phone. "This is Randy?"

"Randy. It's Donna."

I consider grabbing a spare rubber band for self-defense.

"Just confirming your extension."

"This is it."

"Great. Let me know if you need anything."

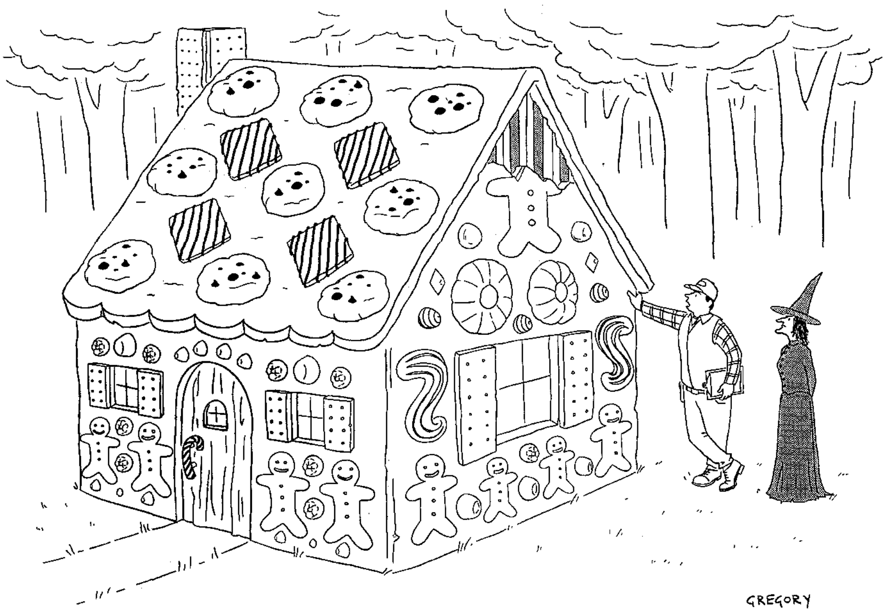
"O.K."

I know what I need. I need to take a break. I need to go outside and pretend to smoke a cigarette.

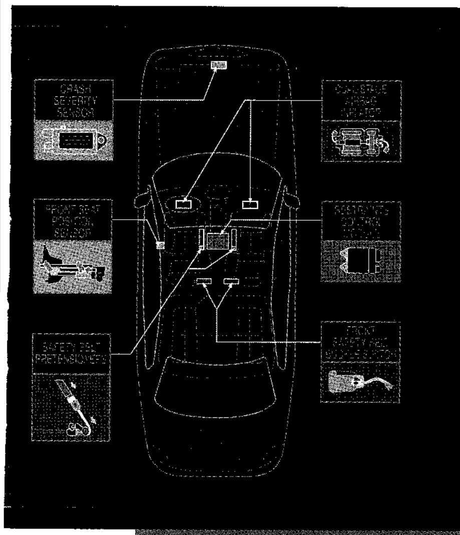
DAY 5, 6 P.M.: Today, I followed a strict schedule of affectation. Every three minutes: stare dreamily into the distance. Every five minutes: flamboyantly rub eyes or chin, or tap finger thoughtfully on upper lip. Every ten minutes: make eye contact with someone across the room and nod in empathy. Every fifteen minutes: fill cheeks with air, then exhale while making a quiet *puh-puh-puh-puh* noise.

I take a beverage break every half hour. Consequently, a bathroom break every hour. Establishing my own hourly bathroom routine within the preëstablished routines of my co-workers is crucial to assimilation.

My small-talk break in the kitchenette was supposed to be every two hours, but sometimes I skipped it because of nerves. A small-talk break is a massive endeavor of strategizing. Every word is premeditated. A perfectly executed small-talk break goes like this:



"See, that's your problem right there—the roof is mostly sugar."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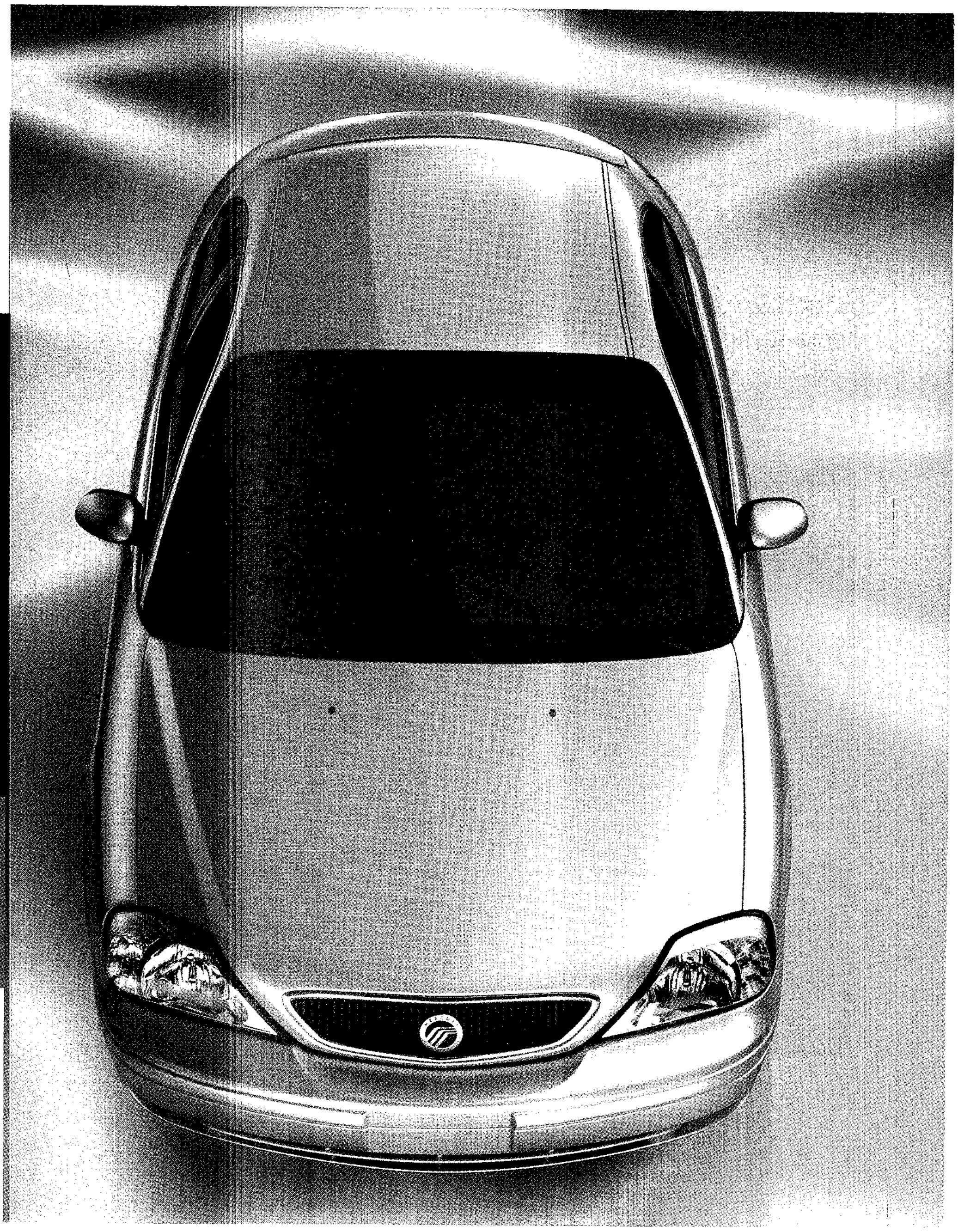

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ME: How crazy is this coffee machine?
WOMAN IN KITCHENETTE: Ha-ha, I know.
ME: It tastes like General Foods International Coffees.
WOMAN: Does it? Ha-ha.
ME: Ha-ha.

I've been at my desk for eight hours, and it already feels like home.

DAY 6, 8:45 A.M.: I came in early to beat the rush. The only other person here is a guy my age in a Mr. Bubble T-shirt. He sits under a large dry-erase board with an acronym-laden flowchart labelled "The Closed Loop Process." I'm noticing things I didn't yesterday, like the abandoned fire extinguisher on the floor next to my desk, or the office in the converted warehouse across the street, which looks nearly identical to this one. I find myself faintly bored, waiting for all the people to come in so I can act like I'm ignoring them.

DAY 6, 2 P.M.: When you work in a room with twenty other people, talking on the phone can be tricky. Every word you say can be heard and digested. It doesn't take much mental calculus for your neighbor to decipher the other end of the conversation. You learn to maximize your deployment of pronouns: "I got it. . . . She said that? . . . Send me it before you do that with them there." Or you can be like the Mr. Bubble T-shirt guy, and try to whisper inaudibly. His whisper was pretty audible this morning: "It's like, 'We're a news aggregator! We're a portal! We're a B2B thingy! Let's buy U.P.I.!' *Total lack of focus!*"

My phone calls fall into three categories. Most of them are straight-up personal. I don't feel bad about this, because I believe that my colleagues would be more suspicious of me if I didn't spend half the day calling friends and family. Other phone calls relate to my real professional life: agents, other writers, etc. Because I work mostly in television, it's easy to make these calls sound Internet-related. I just use the word "network" as much as possible. My favorite phone calls are the ones that relate to my fake job. I set these up in advance by asking a few friends to call me. These calls make no sense at all, on either end, but they make me look busy.

"This is Randy."

"Randy, it's, uh, Kurt, at LogiDigiTekResources dot com, dot, uh, org."

"Hey, Kurt. The links are all crapped out. I think we need to check the U.R.L. again."

"Rodney, do I talk technical on this end, too?"

"Ha-ha-ha, Kurt. Good idea. I'll check that through with client services."

"Does it even matter what I say? Blah blah blah, la la la."

"Perfect. C.c. that to me. G'bye."

It all adds to the noise: the voices, the ringing, the hum of the air-conditioning, the clicking of heels on wood.

DAY 7, 7 P.M.: The Girl with Long Brown Hair has bar graphs on her computer. Bar graphs! I can see her through the glass partition next to my workstation. When I go to the bathroom, she looks up and says "Hi." Dear *Penthouse:* Every so often, she leans back in frustration, and her tailored white dress shirt tightens against her chest.

I generally avoid interoffice romances, but it's different when you're a guy working at an office without an actual job. As I think about the Girl with Long Brown Hair, though, a discomfort settles in. I increasingly feel that I've taken refuge in a self-constructed crappy high-concept movie. I picture us having a secret tryst. Then my conscience gets the better of me, and I tell her about my scam. She storms out, of course. I follow her down to Tampa, to the regional meeting. I stand on the conference-room table with flowers and tap shoes, singing "My Cherie Amour." Then she forgives me, we embrace, an updated version of "My Cherie Amour" by the Goo Goo Dolls kicks in, the credits roll, and we thank the Toronto Chamber of Commerce.

Enough. I pack up my laptop and go home.

DAY 8, 10 A.M.: I ride up on the elevator with a fortyish-looking guy. He goes to five, I go to twelve.

"Morning," he says.

"Morning," I say.

Getting into the spirit of it, I add, "Hot one out there."

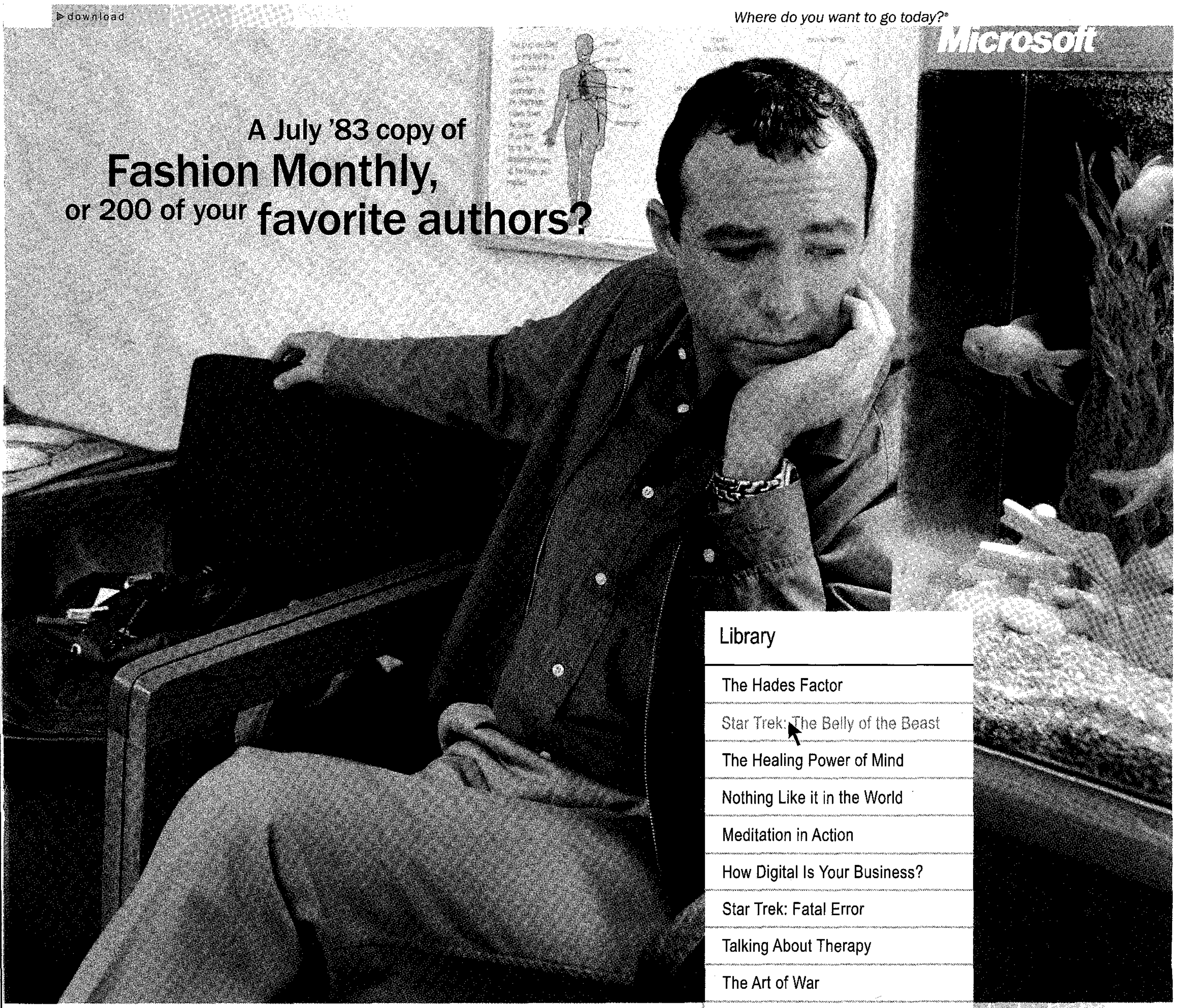
This is going great. He responds, "You work on twelve?"

"Yeah."

"What are you guys doing up there?"

"Uh . . . I have no idea."

He nods in understanding. He's been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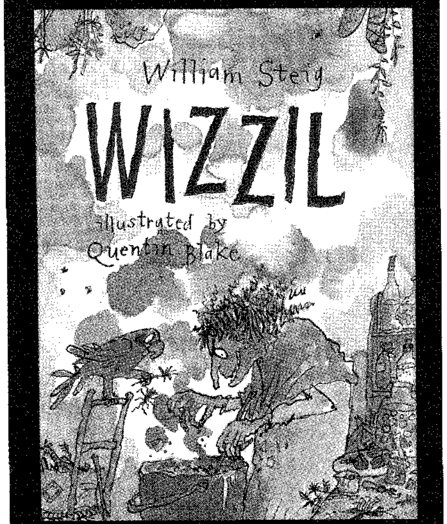

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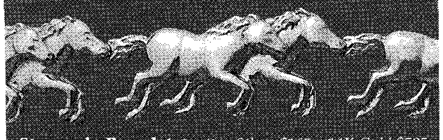

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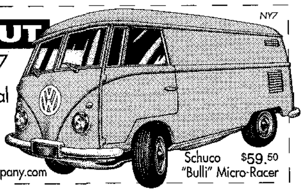

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there. We hit floor five, and he steps off.

"Have a good one," he shouts over his shoulder.

DAY 8, 11:30 A.M.: The Man in the Blue Oxford Shirt is glaring. Every time he walks across the office, he fires a double take at me. I have a premonition that he will be the dark agent of my downfall here. The Man in the Blue Oxford Shirt is doughy, with thinning, shiny hair. You get the feeling that his body type went from baby fat to middle-aged paunch all at once. He looks so ill at ease, I wonder whether he's a fake employee, too.

The Red-Haired Lady worries me even more. She's one of the older staff members. The more silent and inoffensive I am, the more I seem to threaten her. She probably thinks I'm an Ivy League consultant, here to observe her and weed her out. I see her reflection in the window whenever she creeps behind me. We've developed a little tango, she and I. She cranes her neck to look at my computer screen, and I lower my shoulder to block her view of my notes. Her oversized eyeglasses make me feel like I'm being cased by Sally Jessy Raphaël.

DAY 8, 4 P.M.: While taking a cigarette break today, I meet a colleague named Lawrence, one of what seems like five hundred guys in my office who wear black nerd-chic eyeglasses. Lawrence says that his office responsibilities have recently been expanded beyond what he was hired for.

"What were you hired for?" I ask.

"Overseeing office-support programs."

"What kind of programs?"

Lawrence takes a big drag off his cigarette. "Mostly Wellness."

DAY 9, 11:30 A.M.: Today, I'm decorating my desk with whimsical junk I bought in a Sixth Avenue Chinese variety store. I arrange it precisely on the desk surface. On the right are two filthy pieces of rubber fruit: a smiling orange and a frowning pineapple. On the left is a pirated Winnie-the-Pooh figurine, for a touch of approachability. Last, I add a plastic Virgin Mary clock, to make sure I'm not too approachable. Nothing puts people off like the promise of spontaneous sermonizing. I figure the clock alone has added three days to my stay here. At the end of the day, I put a labelled personal item in the communal fridge. Hint: it was brewed in Latrobe, PA.

DAY 10, 7 P.M.: The Girl with Long Brown Hair is working late, so I am, too. A few minutes ago, her boss was down here, standing over her, pacing. I struggled to hear what he was saying, but could make out only a few phrases and an undertone of irritation:

"Are you doing all this in Photoshop? I want to do it in Quark. . . . There's no dialogue happening. . . . Someone should go down to Staples and get this really sticky double-sided tape. . . . We have to put this out."

Before he exited, he must have sensed that he was acting like an Old Economy jerk boss, because he turned and said, "You know, you don't have to do this tonight."

"Good." She laughed. "I have dinner plans."

"Groovy. Bye, sweetie!"

She packs up her handbag and walks up the steps. I watch her go, and stay another hour, glad I'm not a guy who says "groovy" or "bye, sweetie."

Day 11, NOON: When I get back from lunch, there is a meeting of at least thirty staff members in the big conference room. Why am I not part of the company's knowledge-management system?

I work the resentment out through my work: an afternoon spent devising ways to deceive the increasingly menacing Red-Haired Lady. First, I open up a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet document on my computer. I've never used a spreadsheet before, but I have no problem filling it in with random numbers. Whenever I see the Red-Haired Lady's reflection in the window, I click from my word-processor file to the spreadsheet file, drumming my fingers distractedly on the mouse. My only concern is that she'll think I'm auditing her expense reports and go on the warpath.

I also draw a meaningless flowchart, labelled "Starwood Project," on a legal pad, and leave it out on my desk to give me management credibility. I invent some acronyms, box them, and connect them with arrows. Then I write "August 2001" in big letters underneath, and underline it three times. This lets her know that I am very much on schedule, whatever it is that I am doing.

DAY 11, 5:30 P.M.: This afternoon, a group of middle-aged men show up in our work area and go from desk to desk talking to employees. Everyone looks terrified. I don't notice that they're approaching my desk until it's too late. "How are ya?" says one with swept-back hair. "Don't mind us, we're just taking a tour." I focus as hard as possible on my spreadsheet. My fingers dance a John Bonham solo on the mouse.

A member of the tour group speaks up: "Can I ask you a question?"

"Go right ahead."

"Is it true that there's massages on this floor?"

"That is true." And it is. Scattered throughout the office are flyers advertising "Back Massage by Melissa!" It's all part of chain-smoking Lawrence's "Wellness" empire. I've been building up the nerve to get one for days.

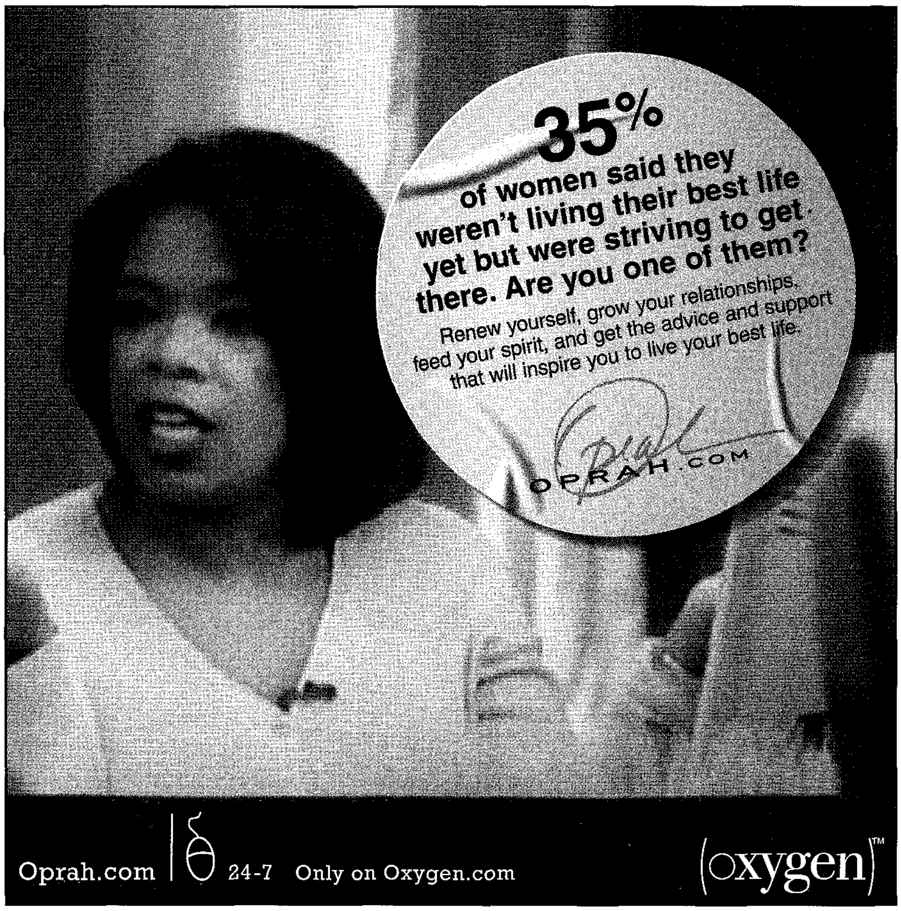
"Oh," the man says, already snickering. "Which floor has body piercing?" The whole tour group explodes with laughter. I join in cautiously, then enthusiastically when I see that the tour group has begun riding the wave of hilarity to the next room.

"Take care, now," the man with the swept-back hair says, still laughing.

DAY 12, 10 A.M.: It's my twelfth day here, and the anonymity, once a pleasure, has become maddening. I feel a bubbling, reckless desire to make my existence known. Maybe that's why I've started signing my name to every sign-up sheet I see. Today, I signed up for a charity walk. Yesterday, I signed one labelled "May the E-Force Be with You."

DAY 12, 2 P.M.: This week, Lawrence and Team Wellness posted the first two pages of "Moby-Dick" by the elevator, under the heading "Elevate Your Life with Literature!" I'm not sure if they have a nine-year plan for posting the rest. I am troubled by the implication that our elevator-waiting time needed to be more useful. God forbid employees stop maximizing for a few seconds.

Did anyone bother to read the first two pages of "Moby-Dick" before posting it? Ishmael takes to the open sea on a whale-hunting expedition because he is fed up with the drudgery of office life, "of week days pent up in lath and plaster—tied to counters, nailed to benches,



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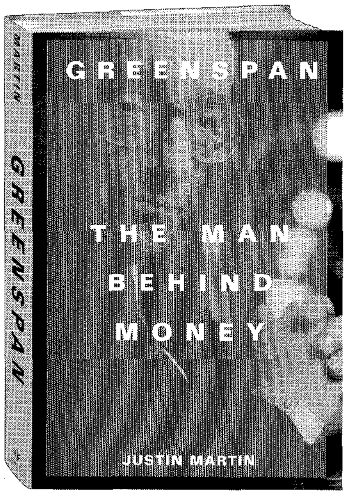

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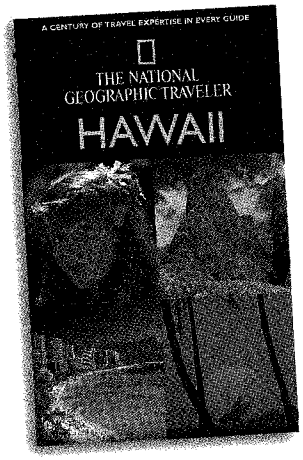
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"Your optic nerve is small and slightly cupped,"
my drawling ophthalmologist observed,
having for minutes submitted that nerve,
or, rather, both those nerves to baths of light—
to flashing, wheeling scrutiny in which
my retinas' red veins would, mirrored, loom
and fade. "And it appears, as yet, undamaged.
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will be the eventful result if you
go untreated. What you have now we call
'optical hypertension.'" Wow! I liked
the swanky sound, the hint of jazz, the rainbow
edginess: malaise of high-class orbs,
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—*John Updike*

clinched to desks." Try thinking about that on the subway home from work.

What was Ishmael so afraid of, anyway? Is scurvy, whale attack, and pirate rape so much better than working in an office? At least our office is air-conditioned. At least our complimentary Thursday-morning doughnuts haven't been befouled by bilge rats. Ishmael, poor sucker, was born a hundred years too early. He could have opened "the great flood gates of the wonderworld" right here in this wonderful wave tank of an Internet office.

Day 12, 3:30 P.M.: "... and so the universal thump is passed round, and all hands should rub each other's shoulder-blades, and be content."—Herman Melville, Chapter 1, "Moby-Dick."

Melissa's hands are rubbing my shoulder blades. "You have a lot of tension in your neck and shoulders," she says. "You should get more massages." I couldn't agree with her more. I've been avoiding the massage room, perhaps because of a fear that Melissa would somehow sense my ruse through the deceitful flow of my lymphatic fluid. As she navigates her knuckles around my back, I meditate blissfully. Free massages. Free beverages. Companionship, flirtation, E-mail access. No disruptive phone calls, no meetings, no boss, no questions, no decisions to make. A perfect job, perfectly undisturbed by having a job.

"Sorry, Randy, back to work," Melissa says, finishing up with that weird karate-chop thing. "Lots of tired backs out there. Drink water."

Day 12, 4:45 P.M.: I started the conversation, so I have only myself to blame. Laura, a friendly woman in her thirties with a broken wrist, has been working next to me all week long, and I haven't said a word to her.

"What happened to your arm?" I ask.

Laura skips the part where she got injured and just tells me her medical horror story. Andy, her "arm guy," wants to take bone from another part of her body, and she's mistrustful and scared.

"And who are you?" she adds.

"I'm Randy Ronfman."

"What do you do here?"

Lately, when I get this question, I lean heavily on the word "stuff." I find it has a narcotizing effect.

"I'm here from the Chicago satellite office. I'm doing a bunch of stuff. Project-managing stuff. Branding stuff."

"Branding stuff. *Really.*" Laura leans her good arm on the desk eagerly. "I'm in marketing and recruiting here. Do you mind if I pick your brain?"

A week ago, this question might have terrified me, but now it excites me. I'm starting to believe that I actually do this for a living, that I am capable of having my brain picked about branding. Laura's question is a cataract of jargon: "Launching a B2B ... E-commerce ... inventive user experiences ... success factors ... so if you know any branding people in Chicago that could help us out with that, I'd really appreciate it."

"You don't want to work with the people there," I tell her, conspiratorially. "They're not so great."

Laura's brow furrows in genuine disappointment. "Well . . . maybe you could come up with some people? Do you have a few minutes?"

"Not right now," I answer. "I have a meeting at five."

This is not a lie. I do have a meeting, for a real job. Typically, I've nearly missed it. "I should be back later. When do you leave?"

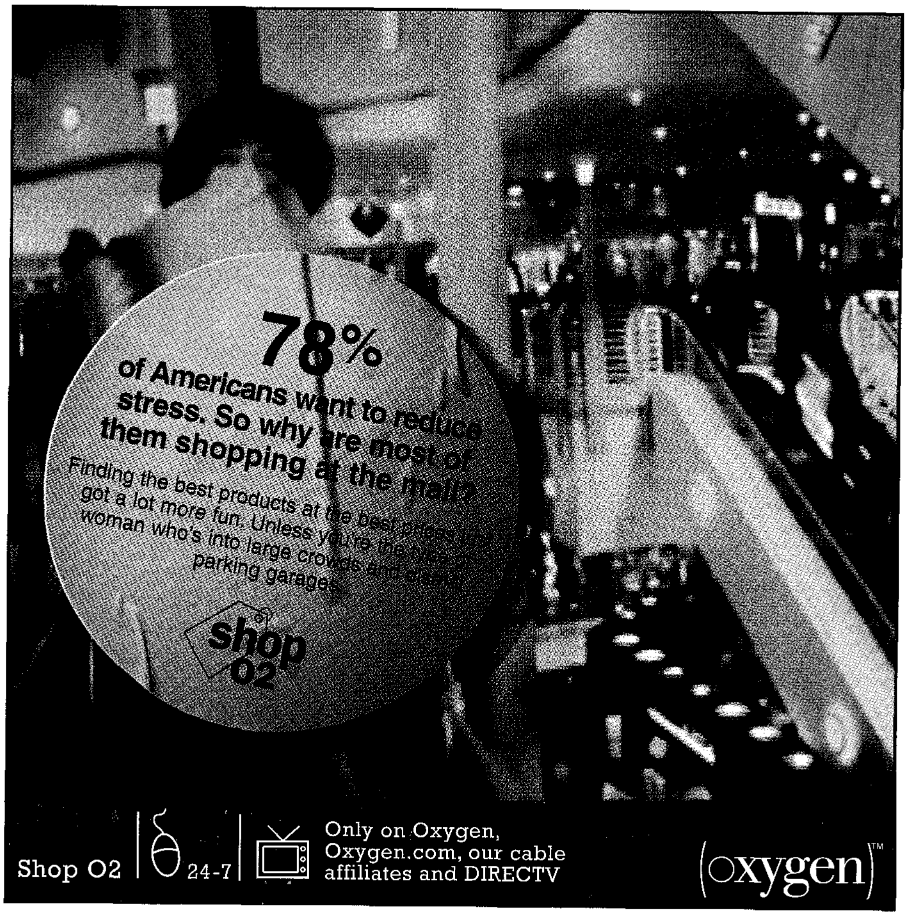
"Six."

I make a mental note to come back at six-thirty. "Think about people you know who are very well connected," Laura calls after me as I run out. "Who could send me off into *their* network of people."

DAY 13, 5 P.M.: It's been twenty-four hours since my conversation with Laura, and I haven't seen her since. This doesn't surprise me. The office has a seizure-inducing strobe effect. People appear and disappear, switch desks, switch jobs. Today, Rick, the head of the office, is walking around, asking where Lawrence is. He is informed that Lawrence has recently been "reshuffled" into a new department. Lawrence is now sitting fifteen feet from Rick's office, on the floor below us, a floor that has fewer than twenty people. *The head of the office.* And you wonder how I've been able to stay here for two weeks?

DAY 13, 8 P.M.: If it's possible to be a workaholic at a job you don't actually have, that's what I've become. The thought of going back to my apartment is loathsome, and I don't even have a family I'm trying to avoid. In this office, I feel productive, even when I'm doing nothing. In my apartment, even when I'm working, I'm idle, lazy, and always a hairsbreadth away from masturbation. In her book "The Overworked American" Juliet Schor writes about workers at an Akron tire plant who won a six-hour day. Many of them used their increased leisure time to take on second jobs. I'm beginning to think that a second, or even a third, fake job sounds like a fine idea. How tremendous it would be, travelling from fake job to fake job, taking only Fresca, leaving only flowcharts.

DAY 14, 2 P.M.: To make myself feel better, I've started holding my own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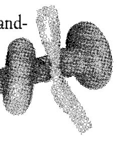
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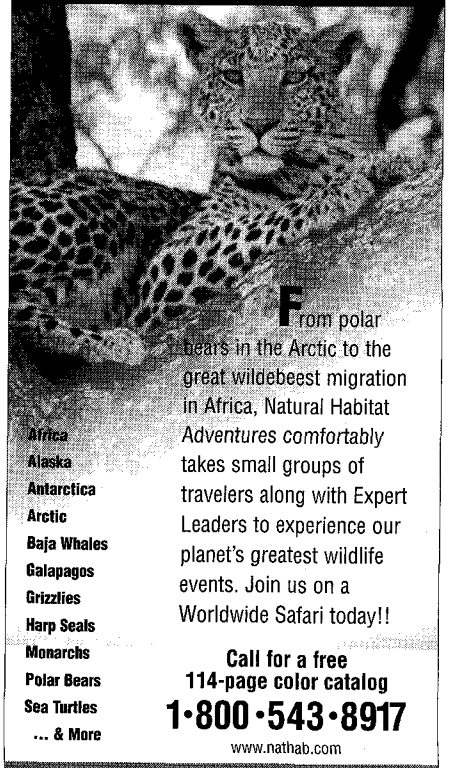
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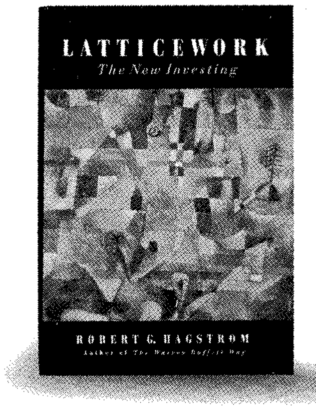

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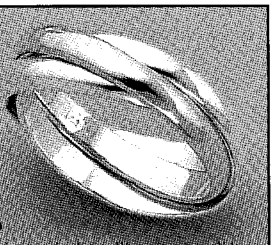

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meetings. All day long today, friends come in, in groups of varying sizes. Sometimes I hold the meeting at my desk, in full view of the office. I like this because it gives the impression that I'm bringing in my own department. It's usually small talk and the occasional "Well, it's great to finally meet you!"

Mostly, though, we meet in the barren, glassed-in conference rooms. We close the door and gossip. For authenticity, I pace around the room and gesticulate madly. It's a Kabuki-theatre rendition of how I think meetings should look. At one point, a woman interrupts our meeting. It turns out that we weren't in an empty conference room. We were in her office. I swear you can't tell the difference.

DAY 15, 10 A.M.: Today, I walk in and there's a staff-wide meeting in the conference room. Everyone is in there. My immediate concern is that they are meeting about me, preparing some form of ghastly homicidal vengeance, like locking me in the Xerox machine until I asphyxiate on toner powder.

There will always be drywall between me and them. That's the limitation of my perfect job. I can never join the inner circle. I can never become indispensable, because, no matter how hard I try, I don't really exist here.

DAY 15, 4 P.M.: There's no such thing as Casual Friday in a company that's casual all week long, but don't tell that to the Man in the Blue Oxford Shirt. He's wearing a short-sleeved blue polo shirt today. Recently, I found out that he's a junior project manager, like me. His name is Dennis. It's hard to maintain an adversarial relationship with a guy named Dennis, particularly one who stopped caring about me a week ago. At this point, I'm rental furniture. I haven't seen the Red-Haired Lady for days. Maybe some Ivy League consultant sent her home to New Rochelle with the rest of the forty-year-olds.

DAY 16, 2:30 P.M.: The office smokers are abuzz today. Word is spreading that the rest of the fifth floor is going to be let go. Apparently, the New York office is now officially the worst in the company. We're even lagging behind Denver, because "they're small market, but at least they control it." Each person present seems to have a compelling reason that they're the next in line for dismissal. Everyone is ticked off that most of the senior staff is conveniently on vacation, and the mass firings are being handled by middle managers. Some new young guy with a patchy beard looks at me accusingly and says, "They're going after the high-salaried ones first." I don't get that. So I'm "high salaried"? Just because I happen to be the only smoker here who bothers to wear a belt?

DAY 17, 7:45 P.M.: When I arrive this morning, I sense that this will be my last day at fake work. What clinches it is the new phone list. Many names are no longer on it. My name is: Randy Ronfman, with my phone extension directly beside it. I feel an intense wave of emotion, guiltless and giddy. But before too long I start thinking about the Peter Principle, and decide I have been promoted past my point of competency. I know how to be a fake employee, but this is too legitimate. The only thing left for me to do is actual work, with actual co-workers who will rely on me. I've done that before. It's not as much fun.

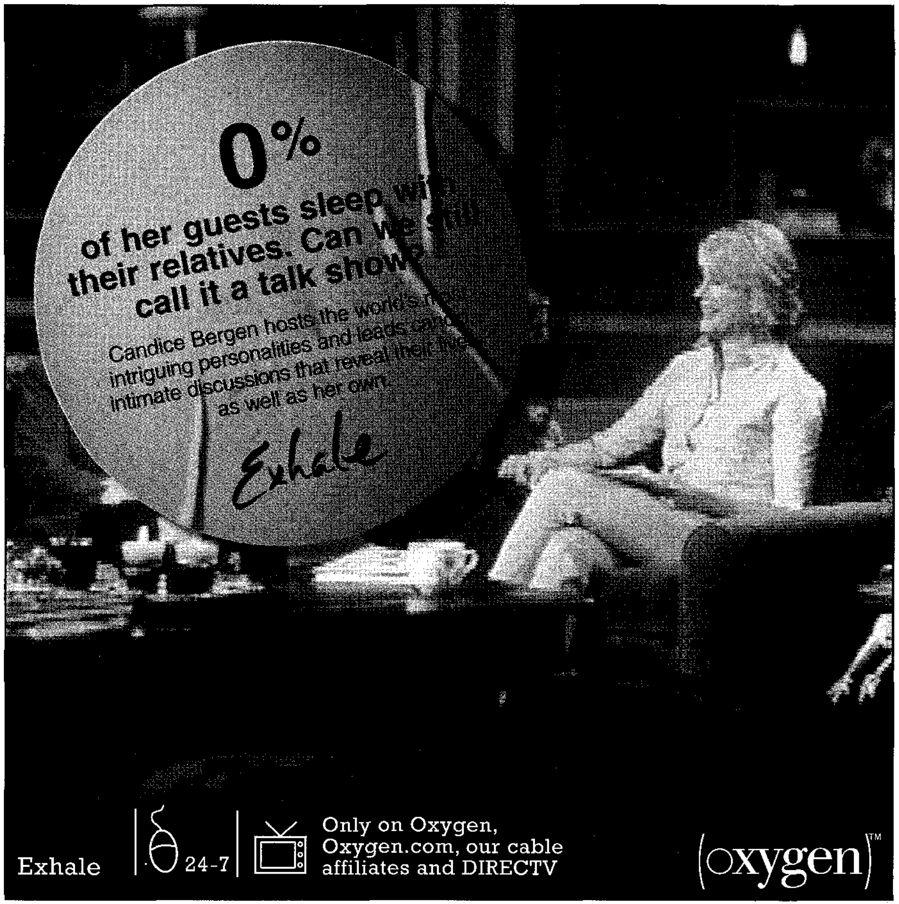
Someday, if I'm ever a death-row inmate, or a guy who sneaks into prison and pretends to be a death-row inmate, I know what my last meal will be. It will be sodium-free seltzer. I like how it cleans you out. I sip one as I go from desk to desk, telling my co-workers that I'm "going back to the satellite office." Many of them have never met me before, or seen me, for that matter, but they react cordially. They assume it's their mistake, not mine.

"Lucky bastard!" one guy says.

"Your own choice, or are you 'resigning'?" another says, making quotation marks with his fingers.

"Nice working with you," the Girl with Long Brown Hair says.

I pack up my things long after everyone else is gone, savoring the last of the quiet. As I leave, I stop at the dry-erase board with "The Closed Loop Process" flowchart. I add my initials, R.M.R., box them, and draw an arrow to the box. I will live on in the office as an acronym, forever. Well, for two weeks, at least, until someone takes down the board. That's as close as you get to forever in this office. ♦



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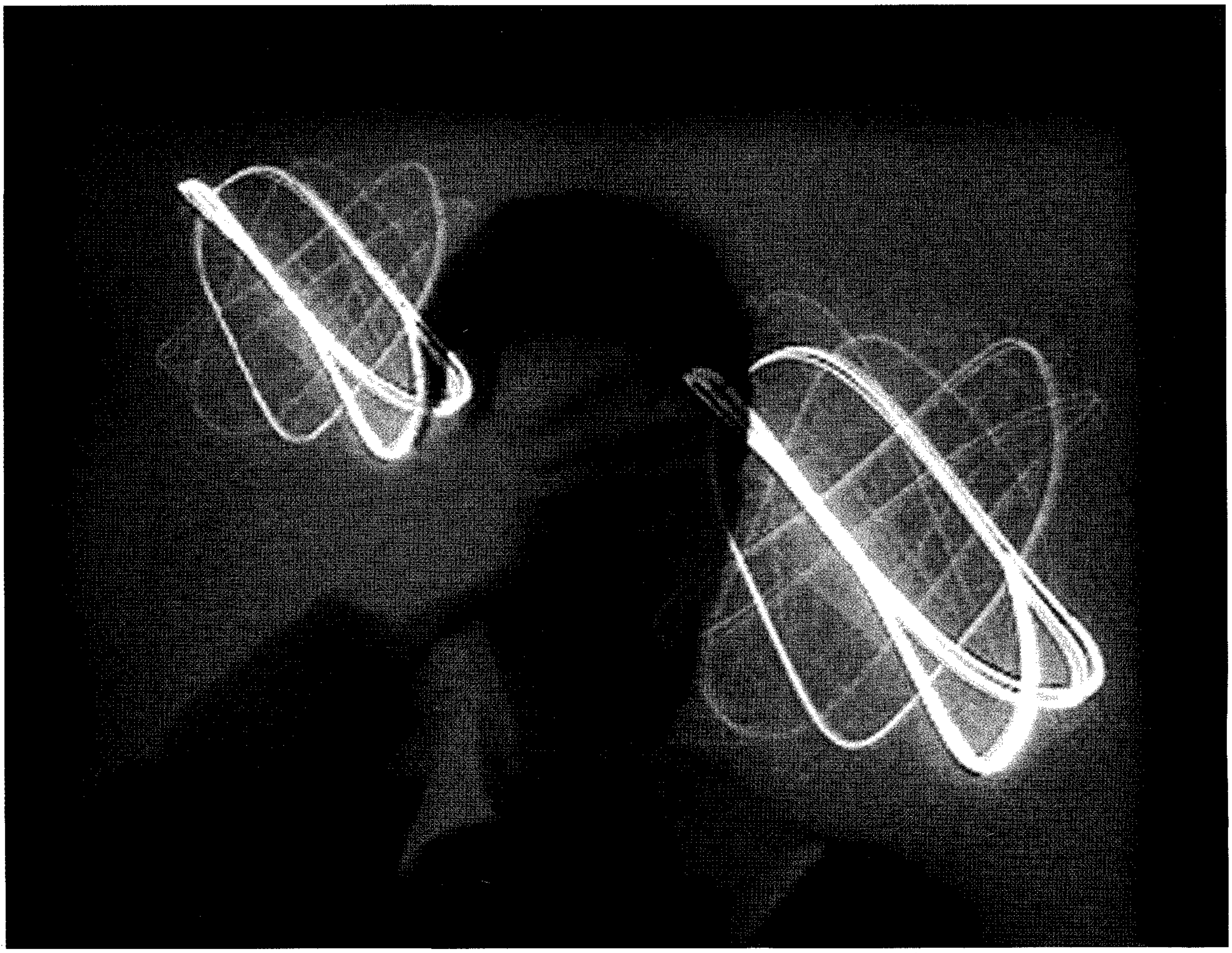
A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE SPEED OF LIGHT

The high-stakes race to build the next Internet.

BY DAVID DENBY



NAM JUNE PAIK, "HAND AND FACE" 1962-2000

UNDERGROUND

At the corner of Washington and Liberty Streets, just across from Two World Trade Center, in lower Manhattan, there is a manhole cover no different from thousands of others in the city. For all I know, I may have driven over it at one time or another; I may even have heard a dull clank as the rubber hit the steel cover, the sound made slightly more resonant by the hollow space below. A few weeks ago, that cover was lifted off, and I put on a hard hat and climbed down a small steel ladder into a dark and fetid cavern. My guide, a man named Tony Gagliardi, who is an employee of the Metromedia Fiber Network, had hung some lights and a narrow wooden catwalk, and together we stood in a space perhaps thirty feet long, twenty-five feet deep, and six feet wide. I couldn't quite stand upright—though my knees were bent, the top of my hat scraped the cement above. To the immediate left and right of the catwalk there was open space and a scary drop to water below, not to sewage but to the lordly Hudson, some of whose flow had leaked into the rocky substrate of Manhattan; we were only a couple of blocks from the river. "Not many rats but lots of water bugs," Gagliardi said, rating the accommodations.

When I showed up at Liberty and Washington, Gagliardi, rolling his eyes, had made me remove the jacket of the Italian suit I was wearing and gave me one of those orange going-down-the-manhole plastic vests. My suit pants, unprotected, got blackened with earth and rot. What, exactly, was I looking

Instant gratification is the dazzling promise of the all-optical Net. But will it mean more freedom, or less?

for down there? I thought, vaguely, that I needed to see the *stuff;* I needed to encounter something physical, something I could touch or bend. This particular tunnel had no power lines or gas lines, just communication wire. Strung along both of the long walls, all the way down to the water, were black, orange, yellow, and red telephone and coaxial cables, the geological strata of New York communication going back perhaps a hundred years. And alongside them was something new: fibre-optic cable, a piece of the network to end all networks. That was what I had come to see.

If you believe the more radical of contemporary prophets, the fibre-optic cable that runs in that wet underground ditch at Liberty and Washington (and through the rest of the city, the major population centers of the United States, and, increasingly, the world) is nothing less than the arterial life of an ongoing revolution—a technological breakthrough fully comparable in importance to the telegraph, the railroad, and the internal-combustion engine.

Of course, we've heard variants of this claim ever since the personal computer became a consumer item, more than twenty years ago. But it turns out that the digital technology of recent years, driven by transistor-studded chips, was just a preliminary step, a necessary foundation. And what we've been doing with the Internet is another part of the foundation. Knowledgeable people believe that we will quickly increase the Internet's output by a factor of a thousand or more. Indeed, in the future we may view the Net in the period from 1994 to 2000 as barely more efficient than a string running between tin cans. The current system will eventually turn into the "Evernet"—available to us anytime, anywhere (through wireless connections), and capable of offering instant transmission of material from any one point in the world to another. We will download "The Godfather" in a few seconds and in a few seconds more send Trollope to Kazakhstan and the grand library of sixteenth-century Timbuktu to Tampa; we will transfer a corporation's billing records to Bombay and send three-dimensional architectural designs to Madrid; we will routinely gaze at the faces of our sons and daughters when we telephone them at college. In general, we will accomplish tasks so quickly that we will create enormous new wealth. That's for starters. The revolution will end by changing the nature of time itself, thereby altering the way we live, work, seek pleasure, and gather together. We shall achieve simultaneity, ending the gap between desire and fulfillment; we shall no longer *wait.*

After about twenty minutes of contemplation belowground, Tony Gagliardi and I climbed back up the ladder, and he led me into a Metromedia truck, parked next to the manhole, where pieces of optical fibre, which the company was laying in rings around corporate New York, were spliced together. He placed some strands of the fibre in my hand. A single strand is so thin that you may, for a second, have trouble seeing it. It is pure glass, colorless, and flexible, and sheathed in plastic. If you strip off a bit of the sheath and place the fibre against a dark surface, what you see is no more than the width of a human hair—about a hundred and twenty-five micrometres, or five thousandths of an inch, in diameter. But, thin as the strand is, it is much larger than the working part of the fibre, a tubular core, surrounded by a glass cladding, that is a mere eight micrometres in diameter. That's where the real action takes place.

"Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic," Arthur C. Clarke said. All right, then: a laser generates a pulse of light, and the light waves, trapped by the core and the cladding, race straight down the center of the strand like a bullet train—fast enough (a billion times or more per second), and with enough capacity, to carry anything that we might conceivably speak, write, draw, compose, design, count, photograph, film, videotape, or play. The network of the future will have unlimited capacity; or, rather, its only limit will be the speed of light, since it will be an all-optical, or *transparent,* network, in which light particles known as photons will run unimpeded through glass fibre, thereby vanquishing the old means of transmission, in which electrons run through copper wire. Light is the medium; light is the metaphor. The rhapsodizing high-tech guru George Gilder, in his new book, "Telecosm: How Infinite Bandwidth Will Revolutionize Our World," writes that "the telecosm launches us beyond the fuzzy electrons and frozen pathways of the microcosm to a boundless realm of infinite undulations." Whew! The new technology, Gilder says, "makes men into bandwidth angels."

To become angels, however, or even principalities and powers, we will need to eliminate many bottlenecks and vexing problems and find some way of paying for the transformation. The price of optical-equipment stocks has been shaky in recent weeks, as investors try to make up their minds whether the high valuations of manufacturing companies like Nortel and Ciena are justified. But, eventually, investors will come back; they will help the network get built. There's too much money to be made from it for it *not* to get built.

Some of us, welcoming the inevitable—longing for it, perhaps—may still find the technology hard to take in. Even as a metaphor, the idea of a flashlight going on and off a billion times a second is not readily comprehensible to a nonscientific mind. In the hope of bringing the process closer to common understanding, including my own, I have been travelling about, visiting workers in the network, trying to fathom the problems they are up against and why they are doing what they are doing. As I travelled, however, my admiration for the inventors was shadowed by intimations of dismay over the future they were taking us to. I wondered if I really wanted to be hooked into the Evernet. Are we truly standing on the edge of greater freedom and personal control? Or are we unwittingly putting ourselves in thrall to a system that will dazzle us with choices yet dislocate us, pull us apart, even consume us?

BOTTLENECK

However far and fast the transparent network develops, impatience will be the goad. The mongrel system we've got now—part optical, part electronic—is being overwhelmed with data, and it frustrates us beyond measure. By some estimates, Internet traffic doubles every three or four months; by others, every six to nine months. But, whatever the rate of Internet growth, nothing less than a transparent network could easily accommodate such "rich" media as movies, video, and super-high-resolution photography. Like water struggling to get through a clogged drain, the rich media require wider passage, or bandwidth—a word that, for all its buzzy, up-to-the-minute sound, signifies nothing more than the amount of information that can be sent through any given transmission system. One can speak of "narrowband" (copper wires used for ordinary telephone conversations) or "broadband" (the same wires pushed to accommodate Internet traffic in a high-speed D.S.L. connection). Bandwidth is usually measured in bits per second. A bit is the smallest unit of information in a digital system; a single letter struck on your computer keyboard generates eight bits. Like riches or thinness among Upper East Side women, bandwidth is something you cannot have too much of.

At home, many of us have modems that can transmit fifty-six thousand bits, or fifty-six kilobits, per second. Both cable-modem connections and D.S.L., which transmit thirty to fifty times more, constitute a stopgap solution to the problem of pulling data into our computers. Getting fibre itself into everybody's homes will take years, but when we do have it a reasonable initial capacity for a completed all-optical system would be something like ten gigabits per second. That's ten billion pieces of digital information per second, all going down a single glass strand. And capacity will only increase from there—forty gigabits per second is the next plausible goal. In the future, a love letter sent by E-mail will arrive before the sender has drawn in his breath to sigh.

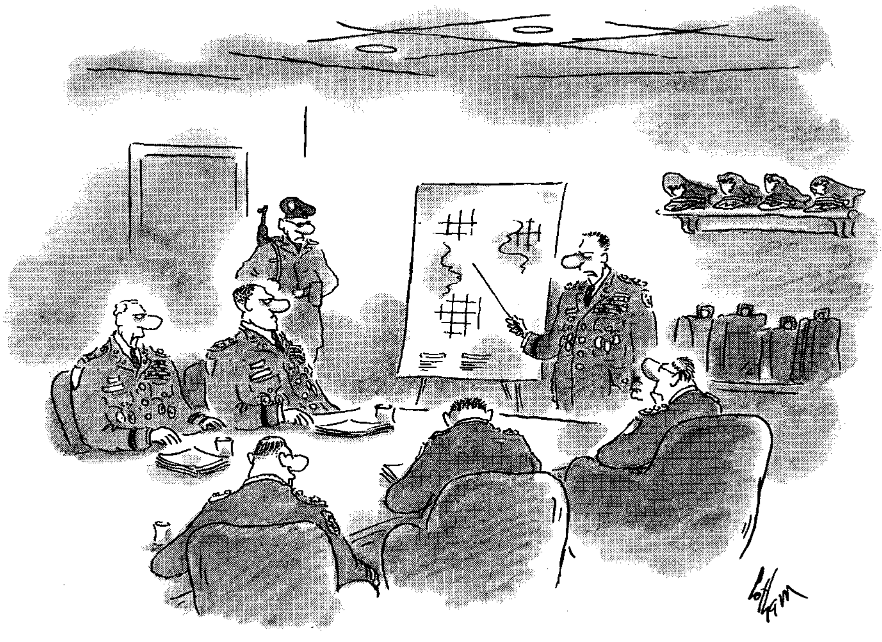
In order to release this cataract, we have to free up the pulsing photons, which, at this point, are forced to pass through electronic canals and sluices that slow their progress. Let's take an E-mail sent through the current system. You have composed deathless words, and you are ready to send them from your house in Seattle to the Immortal Beloved in Boston. We can't, of course, all be directly connected to one another. So your E-mail gets broken up into "packets" and then fed into busy local rings and "meshes" in Seattle, where it joins a great deal of other traffic. In these rings and meshes, considerable routing goes on as the address of a given packet is read and the information is sent off in the right direction, toward the next nodal point. At each of these nodal points, however, there is a delay. Why? Because the destination of light waves composed of photons is hard to "read" in transit. And, unlike electrons, the photons can't be charged, manipulated, buffered, and stored; they don't impinge on one another—they go *through* one another (that's why they're so good at transmitting data). In the current networks, when the light waves reach a routing point the only way to control them is to turn the photons into the old stuff—electrons—redirect them, and then turn them back to photons again; at which point, at last, they can be sent on to the next juncture.

Let's say the line running from Seattle to Boston passes through Chicago. At that point, the shreds of your note continue east, but someone else's data will get off in Chicago and still other material will head south for Springfield, Missouri. What happens to the data might be likened to cargo that arrives by high-speed train at a hub, gets unloaded, hauled across town by donkey cart, and then loaded back into freight cars before going on its way. The clunky transformations from optical to electronics and back make the current networks costly and slow. And partly impenetrable: rich media take forever to get through the switches.

To complicate matters, we are sending more and more information down each strand. In the last few years, the accumulating Internet traffic has been sped along by an extraordinary technology known as wavelength-division multiplexing (W.D.M.), which uses lasers and filters to send wavelengths of slightly differing frequencies down a single strand of fibre *at once*—initially, four wavelengths at once, and now, in one optical manufacturer's version of W.D.M., a hundred and sixty, and, in a Lucent Technologies lab test, more than a thousand wavelengths at once, each carrying a discrete stream of data. Each wavelength is a slightly different color, and, in the current infrastructure of the Internet, the wavelengths have to be pulled apart and switched individually, which requires multiple boxes of equipment and a lot of extra electrical power. Without a switch that can transfer data optically, the invention that enlarges capacity continues to greatly enlarge cost.

By now, your E-mail has required an unspeakable amount of time—at least a minute—to get through this game of chutes and ladders. But at last the epic journey is over. The packets reach the end of the line; they enter the regional rings in Massachusetts, then the local rings in Boston. The shreds get reassembled and delivered to the intended: "Maybe I'll call you tomorrow."

Even if we have nothing to say to



"They're not worth the uranium it would take to blow them to hell."

one another, we demand an accelerated way of saying it, and now we've got it. Wavelength-division multiplexing is no longer just an addition to the network; it has *become* the network, for it makes light so capacious a carrier that all practical limits on communication disappear. In sum, we have created an unprecedented virtuous circle: increased traffic demands greater capacity and speed, and the expanded capacity and speed promote more traffic. All over the country, people working in the fierce, elbowing style of entrepreneurial capitalism—at cross-purposes or redundantly or in specialized niches or in companies that will get bought up or fail—are attempting to remove the knots from the circle. I visited an outfit trying to simplify long-distance transmission, then a company attacking the switch dilemma, and then one trying to find the solution to many of the problems at once. As I moved along, I felt as if I were engaged in a fantastic voyage through the network itself, carried by the light, dazzled by it, and jostled and discomforted by it, too, as a man holding a large umbrella might be swept down the street by the gusts of a storm.

"The Taklaks have a huge fire."

STARTUP

On one of the drearier streets of Silicon Valley, in an unprepossessing gray building, a group of men and women gathered recently for lunch. Dressed in short-sleeved shirts and slacks, they sat at long tables in a shabby company canteen, murmuring to one another or sitting in silence. When they finished their sandwiches and coffee, they listened to a couple of brief pep talks. I half expected something like Alec Baldwin taunting the salesmen in the movie version of "Glengarry Glen Ross," but Karl Ma, the company's product-development director, merely stood up at the table and spoke quietly. "Very, very soon, we will be called to account to prove everything," he said, explaining that the company was about to face some customers with enormous buying power. Suitably fortified, the men and women went back to work. The members of the group—engineers, technicians, and Ph.D.s—sometimes work through the night or run home for a few hours of sleep and return. Many are Asian-American, one is of mixed Chinese and Russian birth, and they are mostly in their thirties, veterans of other, larger outfits that they left in hope of glory. The company, situated in Mountain View, is a startup called OptiMight, and, if it sells its products and then goes public or gets bought by a larger company, many of the quiet men and women eating in the canteen will become millionaires. If the company gets bypassed by someone else's innovation, it could disappear overnight.

OptiMight was created early last year by the Taiwanese-born entrepreneur and engineer Wu-Fu Chen and the Russian-born physicist Ilya Fishman. Wu-Fu, who has started so many optical companies (eight, at last count) that he is known in the trade as the Germinator, was educated in Taiwan and at the University of Florida; he is fifty years old and speaks ebulliently, in quick bursts punctuated by laughter. "We don't make money in fibre optics," the Germinator said to me, sitting in a plain conference room. "We print it. We measure success one billionaire at a time." As I later discovered, Wu-Fu is known among optical workers as "a PowerPoint guy," meaning that his real specialty is raising money by doing the kind of jabbing presentations—first point, second point, third—that employ Microsoft's PowerPoint software. He was very clear about what he wants from a transparent network. But Ilya Fishman, who was born and trained in Leningrad, sat beside him and stared at me in silence. A sombre man with deep-set, darkly circled eyes, Fishman, who is sixty, later told me that he had had "relative" freedom in Leningrad but not enough equipment, and that he had felt the lingering effects of anti-Semitism there. He left Russia, and, in 1989, arrived at Stanford to do research in physics, only to find that the enormous profits in the Valley were drawing scientists away from pure research. "We were doing terrific work at Stanford with superconductivity," he said. "'Look how beautiful this is, how pretty!' And no one cared." Fishman has some sore feelings about a system in which everything is measured by market value. "I thought there was nothing better than science in the universe," he said with a sigh. But, in the end, he himself got drawn into private enterprise—to survive, he says—and now he has invented a possibly revolutionary device.

Fishman and Wu-Fu are trying to score in the market for "ultra-long haul." Remember that E-mailed love letter: after passing through all the local and regional nodes, it was ready to zip across the country. But wavelengths going down fibre are hard to control, and, like any light beams, they fade after a while and eventually lose their shape and integrity—the data turn to mush. So currently the wavelengths in a long-haul network have to be amplified every eighty kilometres or so, and regenerated altogether (retimed, reshaped, and retransmitted) about every five hundred kilometres. (Imagine an automobile needing to stop every hour to refuel and every six hours to have its carburetor cleaned, its wheels realigned, and its universal joint replaced.) Up until now, this work has been done with cumbersome optical-electrical-optical shifts, just as in the switches and routers.

To solve this dilemma, Fishman has invented something called "full spectrum W.D.M.," which manipulates light-frequency values so that when a beam is first generated it is much stronger than a conventional beam and therefore requires less frequent regeneration. As Fishman tells it, his stronger signal withstands distortion, and it will have the effect of greatly reducing the costs of an ultra-long-haul network, since you won't need all those extra boxes and power. He also wants to address one of the nagging questions of the network: what to do with the older and less capable fibre-optic cable? In 1977, as an experiment, G.T.E. and A.T. & T. stuck some fibre-optic cable into telephone circuits. By now, there are more than twenty million miles of fibre-optic strand in the United States. Yet much of the early stuff—the "legacy" fibre—has never been put into use and may not, in any case, be able to handle the latest switching technology. In all, about sixty per cent of the fibre is "unlit." OptiMight's gear supposedly works with legacy cable as well as with the most recent cable, laid by newer carriers like Williams and Broadwing. If the telecommunications providers, old and new, falter in their expenditure on new networks, OptiMight's technology could save these companies a fortune and make serious profits for the little startup. "Big companies can't be revolutionary," Wu-Fu Chen told me. "You can't expect them to tear down their surviving networks. We find our angle."

OptiMight's strategy is something of a Hail Mary pass. The company is months away from shipping its products, and it's going up against long-haul manufacturers with much deeper pockets. But, as the ads for the New York lottery put it, you never know. In early September, I took a walk around OptiMight's minimalist shed, where the sleepless staff labored at testing benches, setting up a fibre loop that would simulate a four-thousand-kilometre trip (say, from Pittsburgh to Reno). When I dropped into OptiMight a second time, later in the month, Fishman told me that the test had been a success.

Since my visits, OptiMight has moved to a larger facility, in San Jose, and is hiring, as they say, aggressively. Ilya Fishman, his research stymied in the past by Soviet poverty and then, paradoxically, by American greed, is getting his shot. By increasing signal strength, the primal surge of light, Fishman is attempting to produce what the Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen calls "a disruptive technology"—a cheaper or easier way to do things which winds up changing and re-creating the marketplace altogether. Some disruptive technologies have laid waste to established industries: it's the ultimate startup dream.

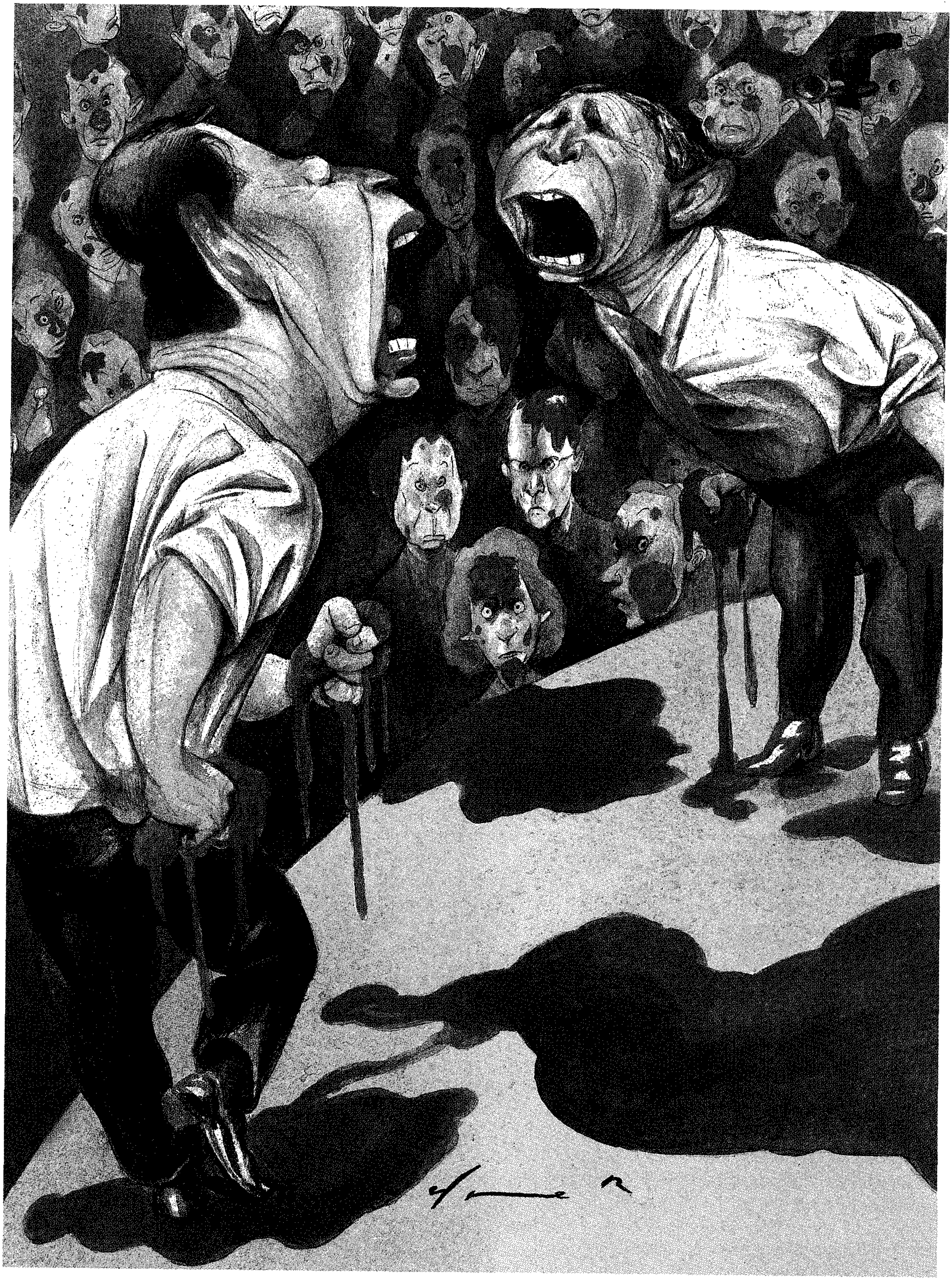
Even if OptiMight succeeds in juicing up the cargo carrier, however, that donkey cart still carries data across the switching points. You may have signal strength, but you still need to take data off the main trunk line and send it to Akron, to Bakersfield, to Syracuse. I was ready for the next stop in the network.

CHAMPAGNE

Most of the companies working on an all-optical switch have been playing with mirrors embedded on silicon chips—hundreds of moving mirrors, in a chip only a few square centimetres in size. In a switch under development at Lucent, for instance, as the light beams come in, the mirrors are mechanically tilted in such a way that they bounce the individual beams to a second set of mirrors, which send a given wavelength into a waiting fibre that carries the light off to its new destination. Two bounces, one after another, each at exactly calibrated angles, with no loss of speed.

Micro-mirror technology is not the only clever way to redirect light. In 1995, Hewlett-Packard asked one of its employees, an inventor named Julie Fouquet, to make an all-optical switch. Fouquet had graduated from Harvard in 1980 and entered the program in applied physics at Stanford, where her presence caused a certain distress among some of the male doctoral students. As a woman, they said, she lacked a "math gene," and they advised her to quit. A perfect score in her quantum-mechanics homework ended talk of this deficiency. By 1995, Fouquet had been with Hewlett-Packard for nearly a decade and had done patent-earning work on L.E.D.s. She looked at the competing technologies, decided that the mirrors were too complicated, and came back to something almost comically familiar around Hewlett-Packard. For years, the Palo Alto-based company had been making thermal ink-jet printers. In the printer, a pulse of current quickly heats a liquid that carries the ink, which then forms a bubble that squirts the ink out of a pen and onto the paper. A homely, reliable technology; by now, there are a hundred million ink-jet products out there. They became the basis of her design.

"It's a simple switch," she told me, sitting down at a recent technology conference and drawing it on a piece of paper. "Usually, the simplest solution is the one that's best." Fouquet has hazel eyes and light-brown hair, which is cut in bangs, and her manner is cheerful and utterly straightforward. She comes across less as an inventor with a mad gleam than as an estate lawyer briskly explaining a codicil. In her "photonic switching platform" (to call it by its formal name), the signals are fed into a diamond-shaped matrix. They rush to a crosspoint—a sealed trench filled with liquid. Fouquet won't reveal what the liquid is (call it optical nectar), but whatever it is it doesn't alter the speed or angle of the light. If a particular piece of data is supposed to continue on a straight path (and that is the case seventy per cent of the time), the light passes through the liquid, emerges from the other side of the matrix, and hustles on to Buffalo. If it's supposed to change direction, a current, just as in a printer, heats the magical liquid, which immediately forms a bubble. The light comes barrelling in, and, Fouquet says, "the bubble flattens against the trench walls, and the light reflects off the bubble"—



"I know I'm perjuring myself, but I'm trying to make a point!"

in the proper new direction. All this happens in less than a hundredth of a second. The switch's nickname, in honor of its effervescent technology, is "champagne."

The matrix is tiny—about the size of two dimes across—and it sits in the familiar dark-green plastic used in standard computer motherboards. Modular and relatively cheap, this device, the first compact high-capacity all-optical switch, will be put in use next year by the giant French communications company Alcatel. (Fouquet's unit, along with other sections of Hewlett-Packard, was spun off a year ago into a separate company called Agilent Technologies.) Fouquet, who has two sons and goes home every evening at a normal hour, is so matter-of-fact that she makes inventing the future seem like the most natural thing in the world. When I asked what motivated her, she E-mailed back, "Optical switches can bring video communications to everyone. That can help doctors treat people at remote locations, help family and friends stay in touch over long distances (young children especially benefit from visual communication)"—all quite unexceptionable, even anodyne uses of the technology. But I knew that more ambitious uses were intended by such powerful masters of the future as George Gilder—the network not as a mere instrument but as a way of life that would be difficult to avoid.

HOT ZONE

When the three-year-old optical-equipment company Corvis went public, on July 28th, the initial offering price was thirty-six dollars. On opening day, the stock went as high as ninety-eight dollars and closed at eighty-five, and within a week it had reached a price of more than a hundred and ten dollars, and a market capitalization of thirty-five and a half billion dollars, which exceeded the market cap of General Motors. What made this an event of somewhat more than routine interest in optical boom times was that Corvis hadn't yet sold a single thing. The company not only had no profits, it had no revenue. Nor had it announced exactly what technology was involved in its all-optical switch. Mirrors? Liquids? Ping-Pong paddles? The high stock price was produced by either the greatest con or the greatest vote of confidence in financial history.

The person earning the vote was the founder and C.E.O. of Corvis, David Huber, who holds forty-one patents in the optical field. Huber was the first to put the W.D.M. system to commercial use, in the early nineties, when he worked for the optical-equipment manufacturer Ciena. Then, in 1997, after a dispute with Ciena's board, he left, with three hundred million dollars in stock, and founded his new company, establishing a "campus" in Columbia, Maryland, not far from Ciena, in the kind of posh, corporate scientific and technological community in which low-rise offices and manufacturing plants lie hidden behind trees and sculpted shrubbery. A blander setting for revolution could not be imagined. From the beginning, Huber announced ambitious plans for an all-optical suite of signal generators, switches, routers, and amplifiers—a one-stop solution for carriers trying to upgrade their long-haul networks or build superior new ones. (Huber may be keeping mum about Corvis's technology because Ciena has brought a lawsuit for patent infringement against the company.) All that investors knew in July, before Corvis's initial public offering, was that one carrier, Broadwing, had completed a field trial of the network, and another, Williams, had tested Corvis's gear with fibre actually planted in the ground. Travelling at moderately fast speeds (2.5 gigabits per second), the Corvis equipment had sent signals thirty-two hundred kilometres through Williams's network without electrical regeneration—in other words, about six times farther than anyone had been able to do up to that point. Taken together, these two tests could be regarded as Corvis's Trinity, the code name for the first successful test of an atomic bomb, in 1945. This Manhattan Project was ready to cash in.

Huber, who is fifty, and tall, with a long, rather saturnine face and thinning light-brown hair, was educated at Oregon State and Brigham Young University, and when I went to see him in Maryland he met me in a beige-brown C.E.O.'s office so plainly furnished—technical journals, a globe in a brass holder—that it seemed like a set for a public-access cable show. Yet when Huber talks about Corvis's technology his gravity vanishes and, like a boy incapable of suppressing dirty thoughts, he breaks into a rakish smile. I asked him about the company's valuation approaching that of General Motors, and he justified it this way: "Look, in the optical business, we've increased the capacity of fibre by a factor of sixteen thousand in four and a half years, which has produced an enormous decrease in networking cost. If you look back at what General Motors has done in that time, it's probably not much—its cars are only marginally better and sell at pretty much the same price. At our rate of declining cost, the Corvette would cost about ten dollars."

I asked to see the mysterious switch, and I was taken to the doors of a locked facility. Once inside, I was startled by the bristling sci-fi atmosphere. Silent men in blue lab coats worked rapidly amid the roar of an immensely powerful air-conditioning system. Suddenly, I was in the middle of an industrial melodrama, a freezing hot zone. What were they chilling and hiding in there? The switch itself, including the equipment necessary to get traffic in and out of it, took up many boxes that filled four standard telecommunications racks—yellow plastic shelves seven feet high and two feet deep. So the switch was large, much larger than Julie Fouquet's bubble machine. It had greater capacity, too: it could handle as many as nine hundred and sixty multiplexed wavelengths at once, for a total traffic of 2.4 terabits per second (that's 2.4 trillion bits per second). "We could send the entire Library of Congress through the switch in about five seconds," said Huber, a man you could describe as an inventor *and* a PowerPoint guy.

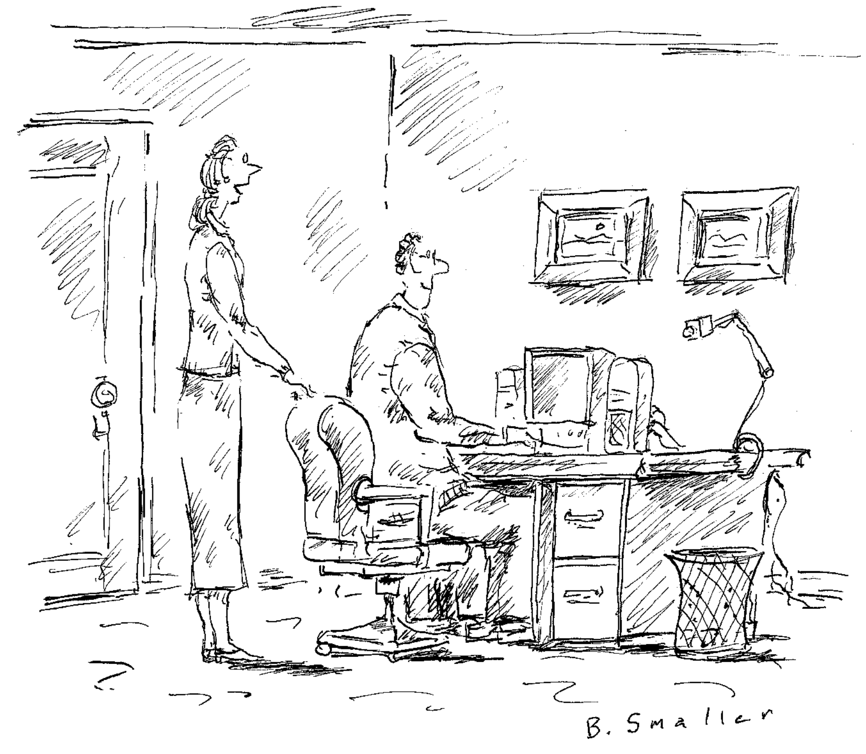
A prominent venture capitalist told me that the lead company in the ultra-long-haul market will gain the bulk of the share, the second player will do O.K., but the third will barely survive. Corvis is possibly the killer asteroid that crushes all the other companies—rivals like Ciena as well as little OptiMight. Yet at this point no one can really be sure. Corvis is the first to ship an all-optical suite, but it has competitors, including companies that haven't gone public yet, which are threatening to release equipment that handles similar or even higher transmission rates. "There's a big advantage in being first, but technology is changing very rapidly," Huber said, suddenly looking a bit on edge. In this industry, the big guys are as anxious as the little ones; the network can be built rapidly only through the abrupt appearance of winners and the brutal threshing out of losers.

VALLEY

When I was a graduate student at Stanford University, in the late sixties, I used to drive home every day on Sand Hill Road. The left side of the road as one drove west was dominated by the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center (SLAC), a low, three-mile-long complex in which electrons were quickened nearly to the speed of light. I don't remember anything on the right side but scattered bushes and scrub oak and maybe a horse or two nibbling the grass—lots of green in the winter and a general golden splendor in the summer. It was a handsome drive, offering a touch of old California and the frontier. If one travels west on Sand Hill now, SLAC is still on the left; on the right, where there had once been open land, are the venture-capital companies that have helped start and finance a world-shattering, world-creating industry, producing billions of dollars in value and tens of thousands of jobs. The buildings themselves are unpretentious, even dull—two and three stories, lots of glass, and red-brown roofs in California-Spanish style—yet from these tasteful offices, blessed with an elixir no stronger than Poland Spring, have emerged some of the most significant computer, Internet, and fibre-optic companies in America. If Stanford is the seedbed of the Valley, Sand Hill Road has become its fabled treasury vault.

Driving up Sand Hill again, thirty years after I left Stanford, I was shaken. The experience, I suppose, was not very different in kind from that undergone by people in the early years of the industrial revolution, when time itself suddenly seemed to accelerate, and a man returning to the Midlands forest of his youth might find himself astonished by the sight of a belching factory. We have just gone through another such period of acceleration: the lolling graduate student of the sixties had been smacked in the head by his own unsuspected future.

I stopped in now at Kleiner, Perkins, Caulfield & Byers, the premier venture-capital firm on Sand Hill Road, and was granted a half hour with Vinod Khosla, who, by common consent, is the most



"Do you realize we've been together through three versions of Windows?"

important money guy in the entire fibre-optic world. Educated at the Indian Institute of Technology, in New Delhi, and then at Carnegie Mellon University and Stanford's business school, Khosla, as a young man, was the founding C.E.O. of Sun Microsystems. In recent years, he has financed such potent new companies as Corvis and Juniper Networks, a junior rival to Cisco Systems. He is one of the men who could actually be described as shaping the next wave, and, having been surprised once, I wanted to know this time what was coming. What would the future of digital technology and the transparent network do to us?

"We are enabling a new kind of economy," he said. "The level of change will be roughly equivalent to what oil did for the industrial revolution." Khosla, forty-five, has white hair and deep-set eyes with heavy dark circles—another Valley non-sleeper, perhaps. He was casually dressed in navy slacks and a navy short-sleeved shirt, and we met in his office, a modest space with large photographs of his children on the walls and a glass door leading out to a wooden deck. "The world will be as different in twenty-five years from what it is now as the world *now* is different from 1900," he said. "In 1900, the majority of workers did agricultural labor. Now it's below three per cent of the workforce, and they are feeding the rest of the country. I contend we have started a cycle fuelled by bandwidth that will end with only ten per cent of the workforce in the industrial or manufacturing economy. All the rest of us will be in the knowledge and service economy."

Khosla jiggled a crossed leg as he spoke, hurrying the words along. He has an orderly and consecutive mind, and, like many people in the business end of technology, he spoke in brief, compacted units. In the future, non-stop connectivity and simultaneous transmission would force all of us to move faster, so much so that slow-moving people, however intelligent, would constantly feel rushed off their feet. In what other ways, I wondered, would we feel discomforted, pushed, even coerced?

"Robots will do a lot of the manufacturing," he continued. "And twenty years from now ninety per cent of the conversations on the Internet will be generated not by humans but by computers talking to one another. There will be fifty billion computers—what Michael O'Dell, of UUNET, calls the 'silicon-cockroaches.' Chips will crawl into your clothing, your coffeemaker—your coffeemaker will be looking into your daily calendar."

LATE AFTERNOON: THE ONSLAUGHT OF LOVE

At this time of day
One could hear the caulking irons sound
Against the hulls in the dockyard.
Tar smoke rose between trees
And large oily patches floated on the water,
Undulating unevenly
In the purple sunlight
Like the surfaces of Florentine bronze.

At this time of day
Sounds carried clearly
Through hot silences of fading daylight.
The weedy fields lay drowned
In odors of creosote and salt.
Richer than double-colored taffeta,
Oil floated in the harbor,
Amoeboid, iridescent, limp.
It called to mind the slender limbs
Of Donatello's "David."

The prudent may switch to tea. Clearly, the Evernet would be intrusive, or else, by definition, it could not exist. Some of this stuff was a little alarming, and in Khosla's office I experienced a moment of revulsion against the relentlessness of improvement. At the meridian of Sand Hill Road's triumph, dismal sights abounded: downtown Palo Alto, its expensive specialty shops fronted with BMWs, was so crowded at midday as to be almost impassable; when you drove into the hills above the university and looked back, a yellow-brown automotive smog hung over the Valley. I had arrived at the treasury vault of the next future, and it had blotted out a very pleasant part of my own past. Well, you say, what of it? Doesn't capitalism in growth periods do that to nearly everyone? Besides, silicon and optical fibre don't produce smog. But still! Here is this place, Silicon Valley, that is determining how we are going to live, and even the technology people I met were telling me that the Valley was becoming less livable all the time.

"In ten years," Khosla continued, "many services would become 'location-independent.'" That is, such back-office functions as accounting and billing, which make up a significant part of what any American company does, would be shipped overseas to Bombay and New Delhi and Jamaica. In general, Khosla said, "we will be connected all the time, monitored by internal chips. Doctors will call us when something is wrong: 'Your blood pressure is down.' "

But mine was rising. Emerging from Kleiner, Perkins, I realized that my trip through the incandescent circuits had left me sorely divided. The prospect of the Evernet was exhilarating and dismaying at the same time. Billions of dollars are in play; an extraordinary peacetime effort has been launched, perhaps the greatest of its kind since the building of the transcontinental railroad, after the Civil War. Such varied participants as Tony Gagliardi laying cable around corporate New York, Wu-Fu Chen and Ilya Fishman lunging at a niche position in the long-haul network, Julie Fouquet creating magic bubbles, the master inventor and tech mogul David Huber nervously looking over his shoulder were all, collectively

It was lovely and she was in love.
They had taken a covered boat to one of the islands.
The city sounds were faint in the distance:
Rattling of carriages, tumult of voices,
Yelping of dogs on the decks of barges.

At this time of day,
Sunlight empurpled the world.
The poplars darkened in ranks
Like imperial servants.
Water lapped and lisped
In its native and quiet tongue.
Oakum was in the air and the scent of grasses.
There would be fried smelts and cherries and cream.
Nothing designed by Italian artisans
Would match this evening's perfection.
The puddled oil was a miracle of colors.

—*Anthony Hecht*

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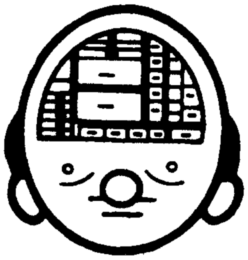
and individually, obsessed with building the network's constituent parts. Yet none of them had any apparent or explicit interest in what a conceptualizer like Vinod Khosla revealed in every sentence—namely, that the technologies they all build do not come into this world as neutral instruments. They arrive with social rituals and ideologies inscribed into their capacities and protocols. All these people have the means to change the ground we walk on, but futurists and system builders may believe that they understand not only technology but the nature of the life we wish to live; and they may act on these assumptions and force us to act on them, too.

The transparent network will do much more, they insist, than just make things move faster from one point to another. Speed and capacity, after all, can drown us in information. With Huber's equipment, or with someone else's, working at ten-gigabit speed or higher, the people of Tampa will be able to receive not only the Timbuktu library but the Library of Congress in less than a minute. But what will they do with it? All the Tampans sitting in easy chairs with perfect light wouldn't have time to read past aardvark and Henry Aaron. What would any of us have time to read or do, hooked, as we are, to the network all day long? The greater boon than mere speed, according to the futurists, will be the explosion of productivity enabled by the Evernet, but that would be possible only if all of us were connected to it. George Gilder writes, "Through these coruscating channels will ultimately run most of the commerce of the world; more value will move by resonant light than by all the world's supertankers, pipelines, eighteen-wheeler trucks, and C5A airships put together."

Gilder insists that by extracting the "latency"—the wait periods—from a given system we are entering a utopian realm of freedom. The old job hierarchies will be ended; the curse of alienation will be ended, too, as we no longer do meaningless tasks but take charge of our own destinies. People connected to the Web will launch projects, and share learning with others without controlling plants and equipment; the distinctions between buyer and seller, customer and vender, will blur. Yes, but how will this make life sweeter? In the penultimate chapter of "Telecosm," Gilder describes a family of the future. Father, mother, daughter, and son rise in the morning and immediately begin learning from the Web, shopping on it, doing business and homework on it even while brushing their teeth. They will save time by accomplishing routine tasks in a few minutes. But then what will they do with the time they've saved?



> Since human beings through history have thrived through work, most people will use their liberated time to perform more valuable economic activity. Using the web, they will be able to work far more efficiently, collaborating with the top experts everywhere and serving the markets around the globe. . . . Under capitalism, where profit comes from serving others, this release of entrepreneurial energy will be more morally edifying than the "leisure" diversions that many imagine to be the end and meaning of life.

So there you have one version of utopia. We will work so hard and long that we will banish leisure altogether. In the future ruled by Evernet, the time we save isn't something we can deposit in a bank and then withdraw when needed for gentle use; it is time taken away from the immoral waste of art, entertainment, friendship, and thought.

The only retort to this is that the time saved in an industrial or communications system and the time we need to do something that gives us pleasure are two vastly different things. Gilder speaks dismissively of "latency," but latency may be the space in which life is most intensely lived: in the interval of a gaze, a daydream, a desire; in the blooming interstices between one productive effort and another. In Gilder's rapturous enthusiasms, and in Khosla's hard-nosed projections, the promise of the future as unlimited choice shades unwittingly but menacingly into something closer to the future as coercion. What of the solitary personality? Those disconnected from the Evernet may discover that their principal remaining freedom is to choose not to matter. And for those of us who are eager to join? Each of us risks taking the network into his being, and then becoming a series of gleaming nodes without a center, connected to everyone in the world except himself. ♦

LETTER FROM SCOTLAND

MONSTER IN THE MONITOR

How an inventor is using his craft to find out what's hidden in Loch Ness.

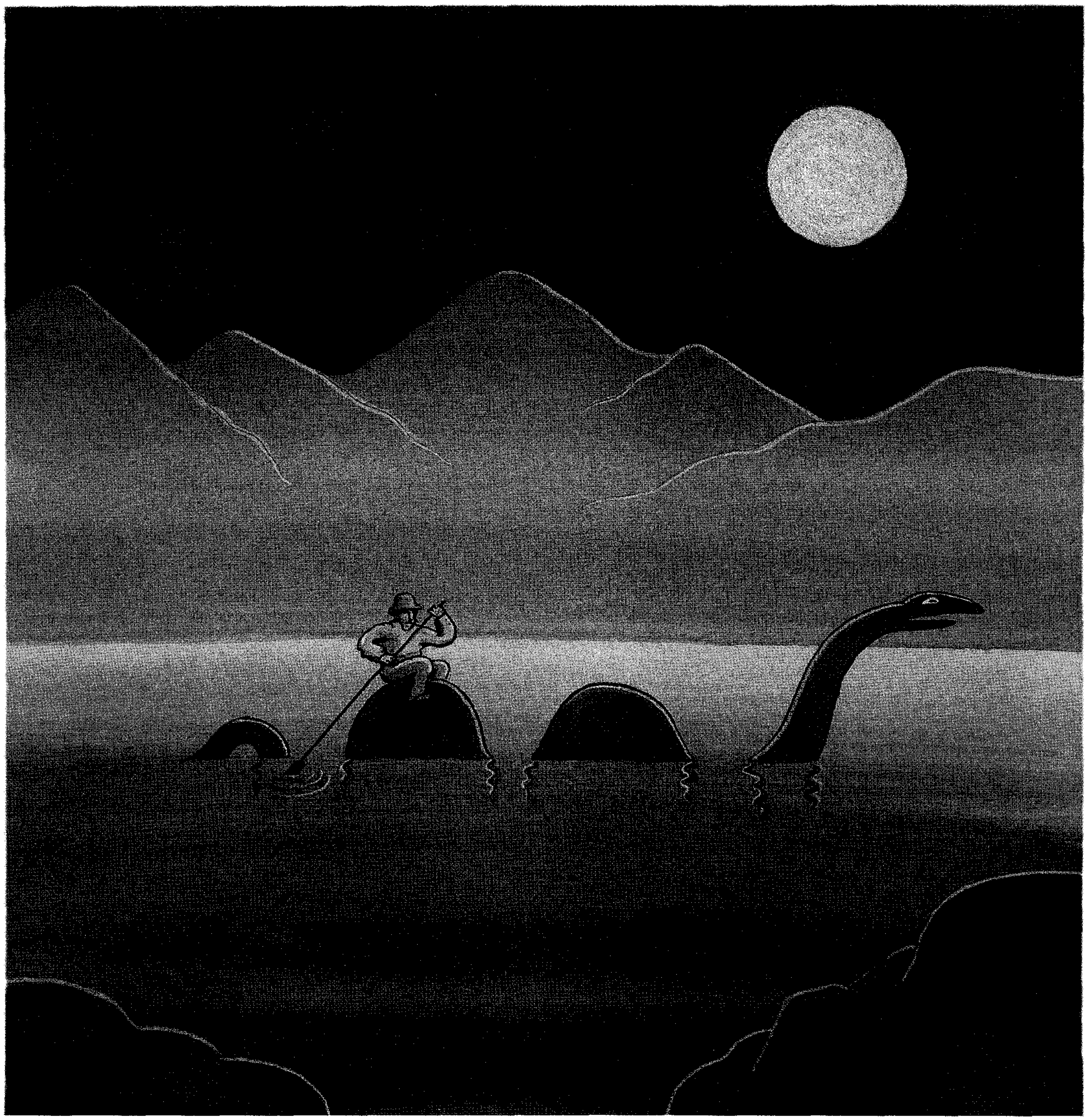
BY LARISSA MACFARQUHAR

The first and only time Bob Rines saw the Loch Ness monster was June 23, 1972. He was fifty years old, a patent lawyer from Boston, and had been a monster hunter for two years. He was sitting at tea with his second wife, Carol, and their friends Wing Commander Basil Cary and his wife, Winifred, at the Carys' cottage on the shore of the loch. About five o'clock in the afternoon, Basil Cary walked out to the porch to fetch his pipe. Shortly thereafter, the others heard him shout, "I say, that can't be an upturned boat!" They leaped to their feet and rushed outside. Cary was running off the porch, telescope in hand. "Grab the binocs!" he called back as he ran. Rines snatched his Super-8 camera and hurried across the road in front of the house to a sloping field that looked directly onto the water. There, moving through the loch, was a large, darkish hump, covered, as he could see through the telescope, with rough, mottled skin, like the back of an elephant. Using a fishing boat moored across the bay for comparison, Rines and his companions estimated the hump to be about twenty-five feet long, and four to six feet out of the water. The hump moved out on the loch against the wind current, turned around, headed back in their direction, and then suddenly, in front of them, submerged. "The hair went up on the back of my neck," Rines says with a happy sigh, recalling that afternoon. "I'll never forget it as long as I live. My God, at that moment I knew there was something in there. I knew it was an animal! And that's what's kept me going all these years."

Twenty-eight years later, Bob Rines is still looking for the monster. But he is no Ahab: he is not one of the men who have devoted their whole lives to the quest. Rines is a sportsman, a gentleman monster hunter. He is a longtime fisherman, and the Loch Ness monster is the biggest, the grandest, the most famous, and the most elusive fish in the world. The hunt, for Rines, is an endlessly complex and seductive adventure game, whose delight is not limited to the almost unimaginable prospect of capturing the monster herself. The game consists also of the slow refinement, over decades, of the hunting equipment; the isolation and solution of intricate technical problems; and the debates, with his companions, over the merits of various combinations of underwater cameras, lights, microphones, sonars, and lures. Rines is not an amateur when it comes to such matters. He was trained as a physicist and engineer at M.I.T., and as an undergraduate he invented a type of high-definition sonar equipment for which he was inducted into the Inventors' Hall of Fame. A modernized version of another of his inventions guided Patriot missiles during the Gulf War, and has been used to find large objects submerged underwater, such as the Titanic.

Rines's recent monster forays follow a long hiatus. In the seventies, he launched several expeditions, and won his place in monster-hunting history by taking four famous photographs: two in 1972, of what appears to be a rhomboid flipper; and two in 1975—one that seems to depict, in terrifying closeup, a monstrous head, and one of what looks something like a swimming brontosaurus, shot from underneath. This last picture was especially exciting, since believers, Rines included, suspect the Loch Ness monster to be a plesiosaur—an aquatic brontosaurus-type dinosaur that lived sixty-five million years ago. Rines still gets chills thinking about the time he first saw the dinosaur picture. It was the middle of the night—one or two in the morning—and he was asleep in his home in Boston. The phone rang; it was Charlie Wyckoff, the photography expert Rines had brought with him on his most recent trip to the loch. "He said, 'Oh my God, you'd better get over here,'" Rines recalled. "I rushed to his lab. He showed me the frames one by one by one—the flash had been set to go off every forty-five seconds—and there was nothing, nothing, nothing, and then all of a sudden, bang! I couldn't speak. Finally, I said, 'Charlie, there it is.' 'That's why I called you,' he said. We were looking at a plesiosaur, no doubt about it." Rines published three of the four photographs in *Nature*, a well-respected British scientific journal, in December, 1975, and, having done so, he felt that science would surely take over and finish the work he had begun. The story received an enormous amount of attention all over the world, and Ladbrokes, the British betting agency, experienced such a rush of subscribers for its long-standing hundred-to-one odds of the monster's soon being discovered that it reduced the odds to six to one. Science, however, remained snootily indifferent; and so last winter, at the age of seventy-seven, Rines, accompanied by his twenty-four-year-old son, Justice, staged a return to the loch.

Rines has three reasons for believing that the Loch Ness monster exists. One, he saw it himself, that afternoon in 1972. Two, he is convinced that the underwater photographs he took in the seventies are pictures of flippers and monsters, not tree stumps and debris, as cynics have suggested. Three, he cites the eyewitnesses. Dozens and dozens of people over the years have seen a hump moving around in Loch Ness as he did, and a lucky few have spotted the famous head and neck. Even nonbelievers concede that most of these accounts are sincere, and many come not from tourists but from people who have spent their whole lives by the shore. His explanation for these sightings, Rines feels, is so much neater than the ones science has to offer: a combination of boat wakes, ducks magnified by weather conditions, tricks of the light, floating mats of vegetation,



"If I didn't trust the people I've talked to and our own scientific evidence, I'd say I was crazy," Rines says.

TOMI UNGERER

swimming deer, errant sturgeon, logs—which make up such a messy, ad-hoc set of theories compared with one simple monster. Why shouldn't a plesiosaur have survived in Loch Ness, undetected, for sixty-five million years? Rines wonders. Strange new water beasts are discovered all the time. Until the existence of the giant squid was verified, at the end of the nineteenth century, it was thought to be a mythical sea serpent. And it was only in 1938 that a man fishing off the coast of Madagascar discovered the coelacanth—a fish thought to have become extinct around seventy million years ago. "It's a ridiculous idea," Rines concedes artfully, when pressed. "If I didn't trust the people I've talked to and our own scientific evidence, *I'd* say I was crazy. I may not be able to prove it, but I know there was a plesiosaur in Loch Ness because *I saw it.*"

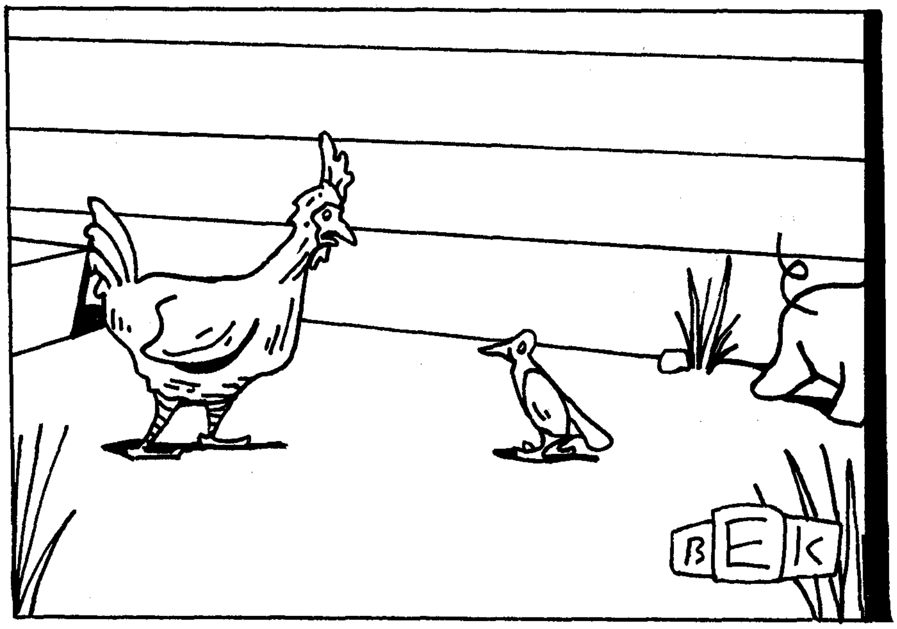
Loch Ness is almost as far north as St. Petersburg, and in the summer it is light outside until almost midnight.. In winter, though, the days are only a few hours long, and what feeble light there is is so lacking in conviction that often it falters before sundown proper, around five. The morning after Rines's arrival in Scotland, it was cold, and a wiry rain was darting through cloud so thick and unbroken that the loch appeared to be sealed indoors in a giant gray simulation of Earth. The water in Loch Ness is very deep—almost eight hundred feet deep in places—and very dark, being thick with peat that washes off the surrounding hills. Because of the peat, the sun penetrates only a few feet down, and very little plant or animal life can survive there: not enough, many have suggested, to feed a monster. At seven o'clock, it was still gloomy outside, but by eight the sun had risen and the mist cleared enough so that the yellowing fir trees and dark-purple heather bushes that cover the hills on the far shore had resolved into bristly focus. The loch and the air around it were uncannily still. For an hour, between eight and nine, the only movement visible was a single bird flapping along the length of the water toward Inverness.

When he visits Scotland, Rines stays in Tychat, a house he bought five years ago on the west side of the loch, near a town called Drumnadrochit. When Rines is away, Tychat is taken care of by Billy Zimmerman, who lives there with his tiny white poodle, Toby. Billy is small and balding and has a round face with big blue eyes. He is sustained in his daily life by a tonic of suspicion and grudges. His poodle sleeps next to him and is so aggressively territorial that Billy was forced, after a year of sleepless nights, to purchase a double bed to accommodate him, though Billy himself doesn't like double beds. He considers it his role to protect Rines from greedy locals who are out to cheat him, believing that, because he is an American, he must be loaded. The fact is, though, Rines *is* loaded and, regarding the world as he does, with the carefree benevolence of one who has been rich all his life, is not really in need of a protector. Billy is, perhaps, a little bit in love with Rines. He speaks, in hushed tones, of watching him teach his patents-and-invention class at M.I.T.: how, while Rines was declaiming from the podium (Rines's teaching style resembles that of a Baptist preacher), Billy saw not the seventy-seven-year-old but "a man in his forties." It is easy to understand why Billy might fall in love with him. In Billy's small world, composed largely, as he sees it, of people in whom Scottish common sense has degenerated into cynicism, and practicality into selfishness, Rines, with his joyful American optimism, his fervent sense of mission, and his seemingly unlimited supply of money, seems to Billy as exotic and wonderful as a glorious tropical bird.

At nine, Rines appeared downstairs, and Billy arrived shortly afterward (he stays elsewhere when Rines is in residence), to prepare breakfast. Despite having lost one of his two and a half days in Scotland because of a delayed flight, Rines was as relaxed as ever. He was dressed for monster hunting in a green Adidas tracksuit, an M.I.T. baseball cap, and old sneakers. He was joined in the kitchen by his companions on the trip: his son, Justice, and Duane Marshall, an electronics specialist from Marblehead, Massachusetts. At eleven-fifteen, having breakfasted, Rines and his crew assembled in the car and drove down Tychat's steeply winding dirt driveway to Temple Pier, Rines's monster-hunting headquarters. As Rines drove up to the pier, Gordon Menzies, a man of about sixty with a face of seafaring ruddiness, emerged from a shed where the monitoring equipment was set up. Menzies has aided Rines's expeditions for a number of years and has gradually become emotionally involved in the quest. He had exciting news: the previous night, the sonar had been triggered by something, and the camera had recorded six minutes of footage. He didn't know what the something was yet—he had waited for the others before taking a look. Justice turned on the monitor, and the four men gathered around, peering at what appeared to be blank grayness. Then, suddenly, there it was: a flash of silver salmon skin twitching about in the lights. "Look at that, kiddo!" Rines clapped his hands for joy. The salmon was good news: it was proof that the equipment was working. "If Nessie's still alive in there, we'll get her on tape," Rines said. "There's only one problem, gentlemen. Is there still something big here?" Oddly, although Rines readily believes that the species of creature he saw in 1972 survived in the loch for sixty-five million years, a significant number of those in solid ice, he is haunted by the fear that whatever it was has kicked the bucket at some point since the Ford Administration. On the screen, the salmon flickered back and forth for a minute or so, then disappeared. "Do me a favor," Rines said to Justice. "Let me watch it again."

"Well, Henri—what's robust today?"

When Rines was younger, he bore a passing resemblance to Michael Caine, with his large, bulbous features, his thick sideburns, and what appears, in photographs, to be a habitual expression of alert aggression tempered by irony. As he has aged, his face has softened to the point where his features are almost blurry, and the old aggression has eased into a hearty and catholic enthusiasm. When he is excited about something, which is often, he jumps up and down and whoops and waves his fists around, like a small boy. Monster hunting is not the only thing that has, over the years, aroused his zeal. He became involved, through former students, with the Bengali rebellion in East Pakistan that resulted in the country's independence as Bangladesh. He has written the scores for ten musicals, one of which, "Hizzoner—the Mayor," about Fiorello LaGuardia, won an Emmy. He founded a law school—the Franklin Pierce Law Center, in Concord, New Hampshire—that was recently ranked first in the country in its specialty, intellectual property. Rines, who holds more than eighty patents, is a passionate advocate for intellectual-property rights.



"Sometimes I get so bored with myself I can barely make it to 'doodle-do'"

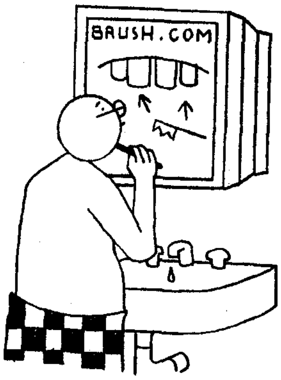
Rines first heard about the monster in the late fifties, when, on a visit to Scotland, he picked up a book that had been published a year or so earlier: Constance Whyte's pro-monster polemic, "More Than a Legend." Whyte assembled the canonical sightings and argued that there were just too many of them, by too many credible witnesses, for there not to be something there. As Whyte reported, there had been scattered sightings in previous centuries, most notably an incident involving St. Columba of Iona, the man said to have brought Christianity to Scotland, in 565 A.D. The monster tradition proper began in the spring of 1933, when a Mrs. John MacKay saw a giant beast splashing about in the otherwise calm waters of the loch, and a reporter for the Inverness *Courier* wrote the story up. There had been a similar story published three years earlier, which had been ignored, but for some reason the MacKay sighting attracted international attention. (Monster theorists have speculated that the release, in 1933, of the movie "King Kong" may have made the difference.) Throughout that year, many other sightings were reported, and the Bertram Mills Circus offered twenty thousand pounds for Nessie's capture. That Christmas, Inverness monster-hunting parties were all the rage. Believers encountered a setback when, just before the New Year, the London *Daily Mail* sent a big-game hunter, M. A. Wetherall, in pursuit of the beast: Wetherall discovered a set of large monster footprints on the loch's shore, but these were soon proved to have been manufactured with the aid of a hippopotamus-foot umbrella stand, and the monster received her first wave of derisory publicity. Still, belief in her existence was common enough in those years so that when, during the war, the military launch of one Lieutenant Commander Francis Russell Flint was knocked about as it moved through the loch, the Commander saw fit to send the following message to his superiors in the Admiralty: "Regret to inform your Lordships, damage to starboard bow following collision with Loch Ness Monster. Proceeding at reduced speed to Fort Augustus."

Back in the shed, Gordon Menzies wanted to show Rines a problem with the monitor. The screen was gray, except for a constant flickering. This was one of the glitches Rines had come to Scotland to fix. The underwater video camera to which the monitor is connected is set up to run continuously, but the powerful lights rigged up around it are supposed to snap on only when the sonar, attached to the same rig, detects something in the water. The flickering of the lights on the blank screen indicated that the sonar was being triggered by something when there was nothing to see. Figuring out why this was happening was Duane Marshall's job. Marshall began to adjust some wires. He had evidently decided to be warm at all costs that morning, for his many layers of clothing rendered him almost spherical, and the combination of the tight black fleece hood he was wearing over his head and the baseball cap he was wearing over the hood gave him the look of a rotund but sporting nun. Rines took out a video camera and focussed it first on Marshall and then on Justice, who was fiddling with the monitor. Justice looks like the romantic lead in a seventies teen movie, but he has not inherited Rines's lightness of spirit. He is solemn and conscientious—mindful of his father's health and always guarding against damage to the fragile equipment. Rines explained to the camera's microphone what was going on.

The Morag, Menzies's boat (named after his wife), was moored a short distance away, down the pier. Rines, still holding his video camera, climbed carefully aboard. The goal of the morning was to make sure that the sonar responded to appropriate targets. Menzies would steer the boat around the area, and Marshall, who had remained on shore, would watch the monitor and determine whether or not the sonar had been set off. Rines stood on deck and videotaped Justice as he lowered the target—a large white plastic bottle weighted down by a rusty wheel—slowly off the side of the boat. Once it was lowered, Menzies started up the boat and proceeded, very slowly, past the sonar. Menzies's cell phone rang. It was Marshall. No trigger. "Let's go again," said Rines. Menzies turned the boat around. It had started to rain, and a nasty wind was slapping the loch into a bluster of peevish waves, but no one seemed to notice. Rines consulted Marshall over the cell phone. "Drop it another five feet," he commanded his son. Finally, on the sixth or seventh pass, the phone rang again. "A trigger!" Rines cried in triumph. He leaned over the side of the boat and peered into the loch to see the lights, which looked like dim red party lanterns far down in the tea-colored water.

Rines has encountered many skeptics during his nearly thirty years of monster hunting, but his most persistent and frustrating opponent is Adrian Shine. Shine is that most obdurate brand of skeptic: the fallen believer. He has spent perhaps more time than anyone else in the monster-hunting business, having launched expeditions nearly every year for the past twenty-seven. Now fifty, Shine sports a gray beard of Darwinian proportions that makes him look older and more eccentric than he is. He got hooked on the monster as a schoolboy, and began his own investigations in the early seventies, around the same time Rines did. He built himself a fibreglass submersible sphere with windows, four feet in diameter, inside which he would lower himself thirty feet down into the water for hours at a time. He watched for monsters while someone on shore pumped air down to him with a pair of bellows, through a length of garden hose. During his first week in Scotland, Shine saw a monster. He was floating on the lake in a rowboat. "It was a translucent calm just before a thunderstorm," he recalls. "Tranquilly, gently, a massive black hump came out from behind the headland. It was alive, it was moving. No question about it. I stopped. I took a photograph. I'd read the books—it was a classic sighting. I got my cinecamera ready for it to move again. I rowed slowly toward it. It then began to look much more like a massive head, flush with the surface, looking at me. I was alone. I was twelve miles away from the nearest habitation, but I rowed closer. And then I saw it was a rock—a rock that had appeared to move owing to the motion of the boat."

Shine didn't see any more monsters after that, but the mood at the time was such that everyone involved felt the search for Nessie was drawing close to the finish. A breakthrough had been achieved in the spring of 1960, when, on the final morning of a six-day hunt, Tim Dinsdale, a young aeronautical engineer from Berkshire, managed to catch the monster on film for the first time, for a full four minutes. The footage was shown on the BBC television news show "Panorama," and it inspired Sir Peter Scott, son of the Antarctic explorer Robert Scott and a well-known naturalist, and Richard Fitter, another naturalist, to seek help from David James, a Member of Parliament, in founding the official Bureau for Investigating the Loch Ness Phenomena, Ltd. Shine remained optimistic until Rines's 1975 photographs were published. Then he felt the first twinges of skepticism. To Shine, it was sadly clear that Rines's camera—which had been suspended from the stern of a boat, unlike the current one, which is fixed to the shore—had drifted into shallow water and had been taking pictures of debris on the lake's bed. (Shine has installed, in a Loch Ness monster exhibition that he now curates in Drumnadrochit, a gnarled tree stump that he believes is the true subject of the famous monster-head picture.) Moreover, evidence was emerging that several of the classic photographs had been faked. Finally, in 1989, Shine staged what he intended to be a watershed: Operation Deep Scan, in which thirty motorboats equipped with sonar formed an unbroken line across the loch and proceeded systematically down its length, scanning for large objects underneath the water. No monsters were found. (Believers have since argued that the monster may have been hiding in an underwater cave.) "I launched Operation Deep Scan for the same reason that King Canute went down to the shore and commanded the tide to go back," Shine says. "Not because I thought I could produce a miracle but because I knew I couldn't. I just could not get a plesiosaur out of Loch Ness."



Shine sees Rines and himself as adhering to two competing versions of truth: he, Shine, is a man of science, and Rines is a man of law. This is not a claim about intellectual ability. Shine says, in his English way (he is originally from Surrey), "I am a mediocre mind, but I have a combination of abilities and possibly a certain force of will which has enabled me to find a niche in life." It is, rather, a statement of method. Shine, as a scientist, feels it his duty to do his best to prove his own theories wrong: to test them against every counterargument he can think of, and to pursue every source of potentially damaging data before tentatively supposing that he might be right. Rines, as a lawyer, thinks in terms not of proof in the scientific sense but of proof in the legal sense, which is to say, persuasion. He is an advocate, a booster, a believer. He doesn't feel himself obliged to consider that his monster head might be a tree stump; if he can persuade himself and others that it is a monster, that is enough. In the law, after all, Shine says, "it is not of prime importance that that answer be the truth; what is important for society is that the process is seen to be fair." Rines himself does not disagree with this account of his thinking. He simply doesn't understand why eyewitnesses mean so little to science when they mean so much to the law. "In the courtroom, that's the way we prove everything," Rines says, "and we know it's not accurate to the tenth decimal place, but it's a system that comes out with solutions that satisfy most people most of the time." Rines loves to quote a remark made to him by the former English Lord Chancellor (the equivalent of Chief Justice) Lord Halisham, whom he met at a Bar Association conference in London in the mid-seventies. Halisham told Rines that he was extremely impressed by the evidence Rines had assembled, and that if Nessie were a murder trial at the Old Bailey (here Rines pauses to savor the phrase) "there'd long since have been a hanging."

It's not as though the witnesses had any motivation to say they've seen the monster, Rines points out. Around Loch Ness, a sighting is either embarrassing or banal, according to Heather Cary, the daughter of Rines's friends and co-witnesses Basil and Winifred Cary. Heather, a fifty-year-old former Army major who now makes a living painting pet portraits, has thick, oaky hair cut into one block of bangs across her forehead and two chin-length blocks on either side of her face, giving her a Stonehenge look. She has seen the monster several times herself, but doesn't make a big deal of it. "Most people here think there's something in the loch because they know the people who've seen it and know they have no reason to lie," she says. "But people don't talk about it much around here because it's ordinary. When it's nice and warm and the loch is calm, sometimes someone will say, 'It's a good monster day today,' because most sightings are on days like that. Or if somebody has a sighting, he might say, 'Oh, I saw the monster last week,' and you might say, 'Oh, that's interesting, what did you see?' But that's where it begins and ends, really." A sighting of the Loch Ness monster does not gain a person membership in an emotionally supportive, well-publicized community, such as that of alien abductees or victims of Satanic-ritual abuse. Many sighters, in fact, don't tell anyone about their experience until years afterward. For this reason, monster sightings refine the issue of eyewitness testimony down to its essence: they point to the disturbing conclusion that believing what you see—even in broad daylight, even in the company of others who see exactly the same thing—is no more scientific than believing the earth is flat.

It is a commonplace of ungenerous monster skepticism that the Nessie story is a myth perpetuated to boost tourism. It is certainly true that she is a great help in that department. Indeed,

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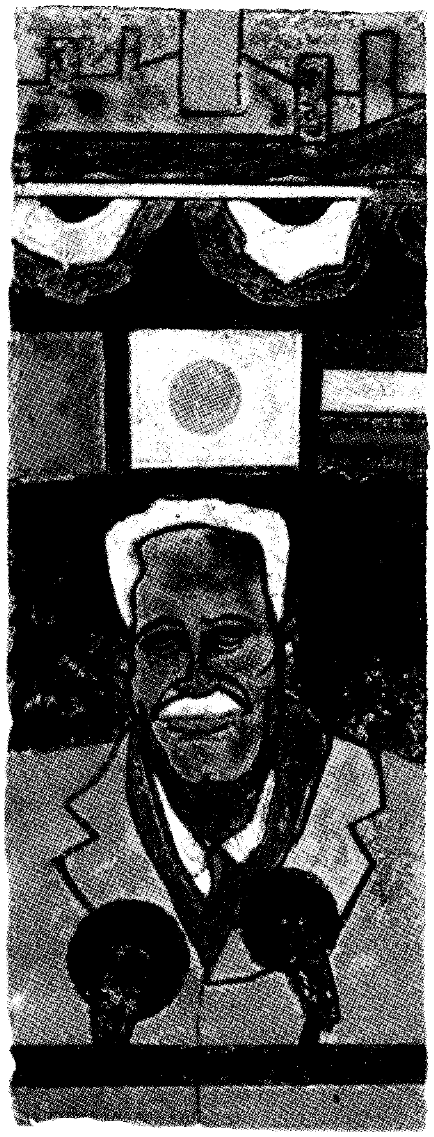
TAKES

The picture of Koch leaving City Hall for the last time as mayor would surely have made the front pages on a slower news day. However, that afternoon there was a huge explosion in Con Edison's Hellgate plant, in the Bronx. The word "CHAOS!" occupied much of the front page of the *News* the next morning. And there was another local farewell that took precedence: the funeral of the former (and frequent) Yankee manager Billy Martin, at which Richard Nixon was a prominent mourner. The front-page *Newsday* headline on December 29th, "AH, THOSE WERE THE DAYS," referred to sentimental memories not of the Koch City Hall but of Billyball. The formal swearing in of Dinkins as mayor did get the big treatment. "A GIANT STEP," said the *Post* front page. *Newsday* made it "A DAY FOR THE AGES." Cuomo was quoted that morning as saying that "an African-American taking over New York" was "a sign of great hope." It should be seen, he said, in the context of the changes sweeping Eastern Europe: "A magnificent picture of rising toward freedom . . . a victory of intelligence. Sweetness is winning, lifting the spirit." Archbishop Desmond Tutu addressed the crowd, and Jesse Jackson was on hand (but was not invited to speak). Marilyn Horne sang "The Star-Spangled Banner." Harry Belafonte was master of ceremonies, and kept a promise made by Betsy Gotbaum, the city's new parks commissioner, who ran the inaugural event: "He will *not* sing 'Day-O.' "



RICHARD MERKIN

—*Andy Logan*
Around City Hall, February 12, 1990

Chips
MSTEVENS

"And another thing. I don't want you visiting my Web site."

• •

in her heyday the monster achieved such wide publicity (one 1957 sighting was reported in the *Irish Press*, Bermuda's *Mid-Ocean News*, the Iraq *Times*, and the Buenos Aires *Herald*) that, as the onetime monster hunter Nicholas Witchell notes in his book "The Loch Ness Story," she began to arouse the resentment of foreign leaders. Joseph Goebbels wrote an essay in 1940 denouncing her as an invention of the British tourist industry, and in 1968 a Soviet science writer noted irritably, "When it becomes necessary to distract the reader from tough problems, Western leaders have three ready sensations which never fail—Flying Saucers, the Loch Ness monster, and the Abominable Snowman." These days, it's true, the villages around Loch Ness are full of souvenir shops; but back in the seventies the search for the Loch Ness monster was conducted in a spirit of great seriousness and idealism. Following the publication of the photographs in *Nature*, in 1975, Rines was approached by the New York *Times* with an offer to sponsor his next expedition, in return for exclusive rights to the story. The *Nature* photographs also led to the organization of a grand symposium at the Houses of Parliament. That event was perhaps the crowning moment for Rines in his monster-hunting capacity: prior to the symposium, he was besieged by so many reporters camped in and around his hotel that he was forced to flee incognito with his family, like a movie star. The meeting was attended by a good number of respectable scientists, and by its conclusion Rines and Sir Peter Scott had persuaded Parliament to pass a conservation act that protected the monster, should there turn out to be a monster, and gave it a Latin name: *Nessiteras rhombopteryx*. Adrian Shine has a sociopolitical theory about why the search for the monster has waxed and waned as it has. He believes that, because fringe subjects like the Loch Ness monster and U.F.O.s pit ordinary people's experiences against the doctrines of the scientific establishment, they flourish at times of anti-establishment ebullience. In times of optimism and change, people like Rines look adventurous and hopeful rather than crazy. If Shine's theory is right, it would explain a 1975 comment in *Peace News*, an anarchist-pacifist newspaper: "You know I really want that beastie to be real and to be a pre-historic survival. It would give me a feeling of confidence about the world turning out all right after all. . . . If there really is a herd of Plesiosaurs splashing around in Loch Ness, it'll mean anything can be true. Which isn't far off saying anything can come true and that's something I have to believe."

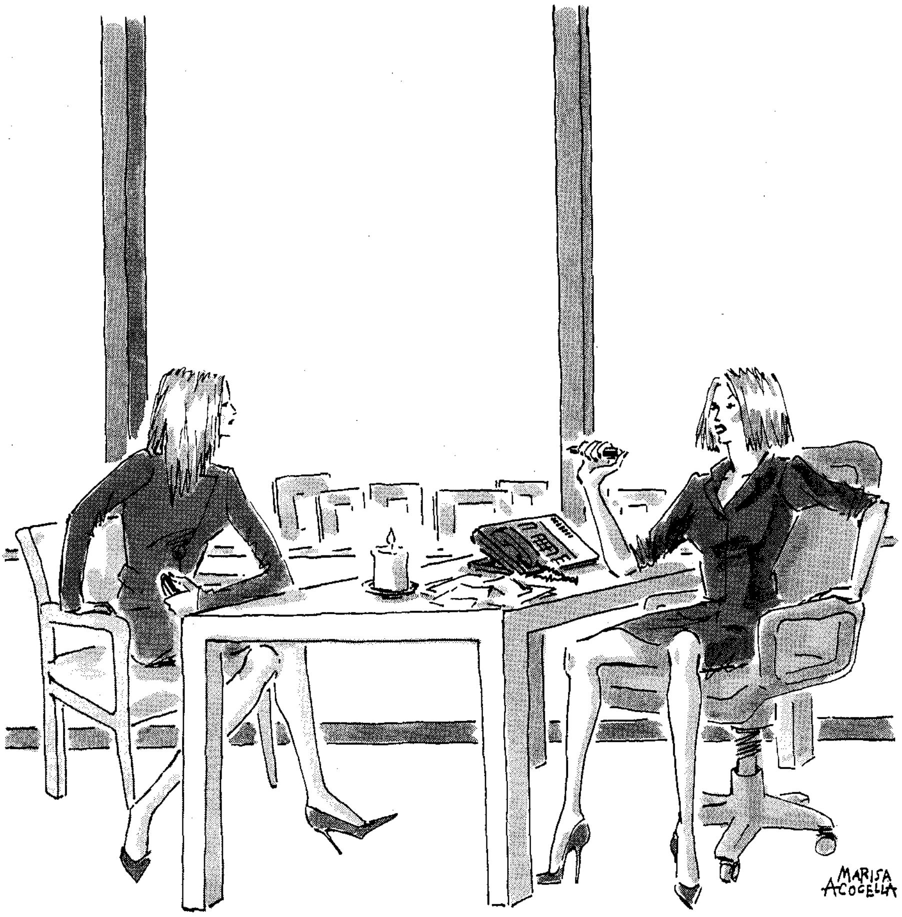
There are still monster idealists around, of course, though the breed is not as common as it used to be. One such is the monster watcher Steve Feltham, who lives in a trailer parked on the pebbles at the loch's edge, near the town of Dores, across the water from Temple Pier. Feltham is thirty-seven, he has been living in his trailer at Loch Ness for almost ten years, and he plans to stay there for the rest of his life. He has seen the monster only once, eight years ago, and even that time was fleeting and ambiguous. Feltham is visited by hundreds of tourists all year long, and he finds that he becomes, for some of them, the repository of their fantasies of escape. Still enmeshed in the nine-to-five job, the mortgage payments, and the family, monster tourists like to think about Feltham having left all that behind to follow his calling, and they send him little bits of money here and there to keep him afloat. Over the years, Feltham has told some of his visitors about his dream of exchanging his trailer for the more spacious quarters of a London double-decker, and many have told him that if they won the lottery he'd get his bus.

Shine is as nostalgic as the next man about monster idealism—it is, after all, the fuel that has driven him for most of his life—but he also takes a certain pleasure in styling himself as the dour, pragmatic sifter of facts to Rines's ecstatic believer. What claim he has to intellectual integrity derives, Shine feels, from a self-abnegating commitment to the rigors of the scientific method, and a principled resistance to the lure of monster hopefulness. There is a sentence in William James's essay "The Will to Believe" that describes perfectly the tenor of Shine's devotion: "When one turns to the magnificent edifice of the physical sciences, and sees how it was reared; what thousands of disinterested moral lives of men lie buried in its mere foundations; what patience and postponement, what choking down of preference, what submission to the icy laws of outer fact are wrought into its very stones and mortar; how absolutely impersonal it stands in its vast augustness—then how besotted and contemptible seems every little sentimentalist who comes blowing his voluntary smoke wreaths, and pretending to decide things from out of his private dream!"

Around five, it grew too dark to conduct further business on the loch, and Rines, Justice, and Marshall drove back to Tychat. Strangely, after the cloudy day, the night was clear and the sky was full of stars. Rines and Marshall settled into the sofas in the living room with mugs of tea, and Justice built a fire. They spent some time discussing what they needed to accomplish before returning to Boston: a diver would show up the following morning to check that the camera was pointing forward as it was supposed to, and then, by swimming about in front of the lens, would help them to calculate the camera's range and to calibrate the actual size of objects that appeared on the monitor. Conversation turned to technical matters—plans for the future. Justice wanted to install an underwater microphone in the loch, and then play whatever it recorded back into the water. "If these monsters are territorial, as a lot of animals are, then they're going to want to approach the noise and get whatever's making it out of their territory," he explained. "It works with birds. When you play back their songs at them they go nuts—they start attacking the speakers." Rines wanted to adjust the sonar transmitter so that it pulsed every thirty seconds rather than every ten. Why? he was asked. He paused to think about it. "Hunch," he said finally. "Something that's occasional inspires curiosity. And I've got to go with what luck we had before: we had luck in '72 and in '75, and those strobe lights flashed every thirty seconds." Rines is always coming up with innovative hunting methods. On his very first expedition, he attempted to lure the monster with marine-animal sex hormones—extracts from the glands of eels, sea cows, and sea lions. Another time, he planned to loose a pair of camera-bearing dolphins into the loch, reasoning that dolphins, being friendly animals, were bound to seek out whatever might be lurking in the water. (The plan fell through when one of the dolphins died unexpectedly, just before making the journey from Massachusetts.)

Feeling a rush of elation after the day's work, Rines was moved to give an impromptu speech to his companions. "My dear friends," he said. "Today is a wonderful day for us. This is the first time we've had a permanent station at Loch Ness with an on-site director. Gordon Menzies is taking a personal interest in this project, and he's technically qualified." Rines paused to let the significance of this development sink in. A permanent station had been a dream of his for a long time. For thirty years, he had been frustrated by the chancy, intermittent nature of his search; now, finally, he was free to leave Scotland knowing that, in his absence, the underwater camera would be watching for the monster, day and night. He knew, too, that he had passed his mission on to the next generation. He was himself almost eighty years old—there was no telling how much time he had left. But Justice had seen the monster—once, briefly, a few years ago—and he had come to share his father's passion for the chase. Rines looked around at his audience sitting in the firelight, as though he imagined himself giving a lecture in a large hall. "At long last," he continued after a moment, raising his mug, "we are masters of our own destinies. Let's get this sonar rigged, so if something comes in we're not going to goof. This is a new era for us. A whole new ballgame!"

Rines will never give up looking for the Loch Ness monster. Even if he doesn't ever encounter her again, he knows that she exists, because he saw her. There is something aboriginal about his faith in his own eyes, and something magnificent in his rejection of the civilized disciplines that parse and correct fallible sensation. Not for him science's careful deductions, charting the unknown with known patterns, in the belief that Nature must be uniform. Rines is a lawyer and an inventor, and as such he believes that the world can be re-formed in a moment: a new argument, a new tool, an instant's astonishing vision, and suddenly everything is different. ♦



"If she wasn't such a bitch, she wouldn't have anything going for her."

FICTION

THE MOST BASIC PLAN

BY TOBIAS WOLFF

He had an appointment at a funeral home and was itching to leave. His mother was dying, here in her own bed, as she had wished, with him in attendance. He'd been feeding her ice chips. It was the only thing he could do for her anymore. She seemed to be sleeping again, but he forced himself to wait a little longer before he left.

He eased himself onto the couch he'd been camped on and resumed leafing through one of her photo albums. It had been his favorite when he was a boy, because it showed his mother when she was a girl, in a sepia world of flapper dresses and frilly-legged bathing suits and Franklin touring cars. Here she was at her first communion, the very image of his own young daughter. The resemblance made him homesick; it was that close. His mother stared heavenward in an unctuously reverent pose surely dictated by the photographer, for neither unction nor reverence formed any part of her nature. She'd always treated his own bouts of religious faith with plain puzzlement.

And here, a little older, on the fantail of a ship, flanked by her frail, sweet-faced mother and her father, a short man in a Navy uniform, arms crossed over his chest. A right prick, that one. A tireless pedant, a cheapskate, a bully. When her mother died he made her leave school and turned her into a house slave. She ran away at seventeen, after he fired his pistol at a boy hiding in their back yard, waiting for her to sneak out. She seldom spoke of him, and then with tight lips. At his funeral she had worn an expression of rare, adamant coldness, almost of triumph. Why had she gone at all? Just to make sure?

Ah, and this one, the best one, his mother standing before a long surfboard stuck in the sands of Waikiki Beach, where she had been taught to ride the waves by Duke Kahanamoku himself. She was lean and lovely and faced the camera with a bravado that made him stare. This was the great friend of his youth, this reckless beauty. With him in tow, cheering her on, she had pulled up stakes and willed their sullen car down the roads of this country on any pretext—Florida weather, a uranium strike in Utah, a mean boyfriend to shake off. To her all motion was upward motion.

He was going to be late for his appointment. It was Friday afternoon; if he didn't go now he'd have to wait till Monday. The thought of not getting out touched him with a kind of panic. He stood over his mother and looked down at her thin white hair, a mist above her scalp. Her shoulders rose and fell with the shallow rasp of her breathing. He whispered to her. Waited, whispered again. Nothing.

On his way out he stopped in the staff room and asked Feliz, the young woman on duty, to look in now and then and feed his mother some ice chips if she woke up before he returned. She agreed, but he felt her resentment. She was new on the staff and afraid of his mother's wasted body, as he was; he'd seen her timidity that morning, when the two of them had sponged his mother down, and he supposed she'd seen his.

Please, he said. I won't be gone long.

Yes, O.K., she said, but she would not meet his eyes.

God, it was good busting out of there—firing up the lollipop-red Miata he'd rented and gunning it out of the parking lot, the sun on his face. The travel agent who'd booked his flight to Miami had got him a bargain rate on a midsized Buick sedan, but once he stepped out of the terminal and into the warm twilight he was somehow overcome by the idea of a convertible; and when he went back inside and the beautiful Cubana at the counter mentioned that she had a Miata for hire, he took it without hesitation though it was overpriced and, given the occasion, maybe a little festive.

He'd never driven a sports car before, and he liked being close to the road and open to the sky. During his hours in the darkened, lavender-scented apartment he was aware of the car outside and the thought of it pleased him.

He hadn't found much to be pleased with, least of all the long hours of useless witness to his mother's dying—not being able to reach her, not knowing what to do or say. Wanting her to die, get it over with. He felt he'd been cast in a low part, like the night he ransacked the apartment for her jewelry. He had done this after a funeral-home director told him that others with access—caregivers, building staff—might help themselves if he didn't get there first. It happens all the time, the man said sadly. It was a ghoulish business, rifling through every drawer and shelf while his mother lay curled on her bed. Now and then she stirred and he froze like a thief, hand in a coat pocket, under a pile of sweaters, holding his breath. It was all there, everything he remembered, anyway, and none of it worth stealing—his daughter would use the stuff for playing dress-up. And he'd given himself yet another reason for feeling morally dwarfed by the underpaid women who'd looked after his mother and liked her and now simply and helplessly grieved for her.

The funeral home was a few blocks away. This was the fourth one he'd arranged to visit. He was after the most basic plan: cremation, placement of ashes in a generic container, filing of death certificates. His mother wanted cremation and would certainly approve of his comparison shopping. She herself had a flinty incapacity for the pieties of mourning. Two weeks after her last husband's death she was on a cruise ship in the Aegean. When her Chow Chow, Mugsy—dearer to her than any husband—got run over by a truck, she bought a life-size statue to mark his resting place in her back yard, but the statue was of an Airedale; she'd picked it up for a song after the guy who'd commissioned it reneged on the deal.

Grolier and Sons Colonial Memorial Chapel had a Spanish-mission look that immediately put him on alert. Who but the bereaved would pay for the fancy tiled roof, the faux bell tower? The prices he'd already collected ranged from eleven hundred to a ballsy eighteen hundred bucks for the same service. What kind of nerve did Grolier and Sons have?

He was met at the door by a tall woman in a black suit. She had close-cut black hair with a streak of white across one temple, and her lips were painted a deep maroon. She regarded him so fixedly as he introduced himself that he stammered his own name and lost hers altogether. Come, she said, and he followed her down the hallway in a trail of perfume spiced faintly with sweat. The building was cool and silent. Hushed. The woman told him that everyone else was out on duty. They had had two burials that afternoon, and she'd left one of them early to meet with him. If she seemed . . . how does one . . . *out of sorts*, yes, out of sorts, it was because she'd been caught in traffic and reached the home only a few minutes earlier, late for their appointment. She thought she had missed him. Most unprofessional! But it seemed he had been late, too, no? So they were even. Even Stephen.

The woman showed him to a small office and listened while he described his mother's situation and what he had in mind. She kept her dark eyes straight on him as he spoke. He was again made awkward by the directness of her gaze.

This is the hardest part, she said. My old papa died last year, and I know this is no picnic. You were close to your mother, yes?

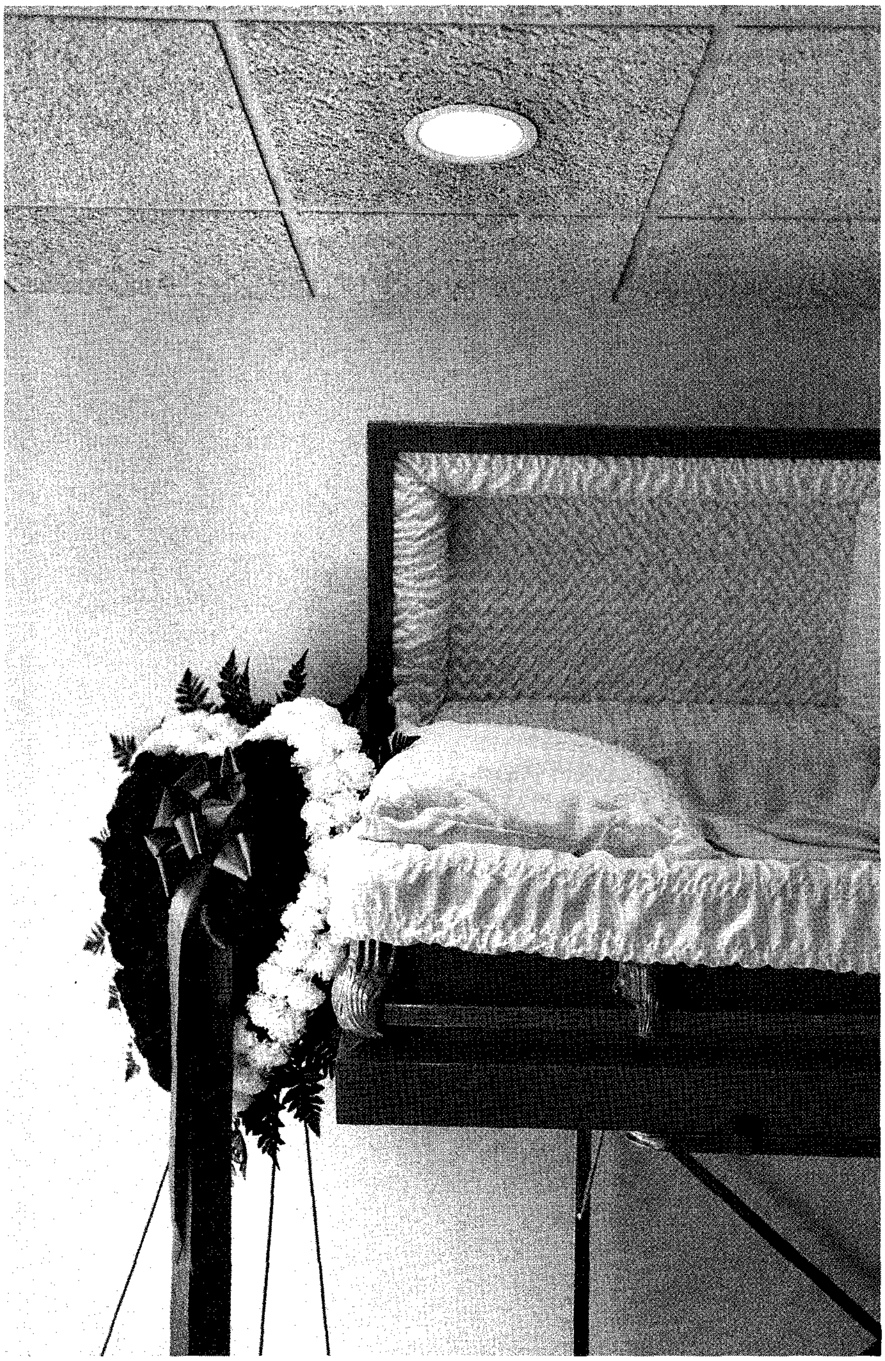
We were close.

I can tell, she said.

He asked her what Grolier and Sons would charge for what he wanted.

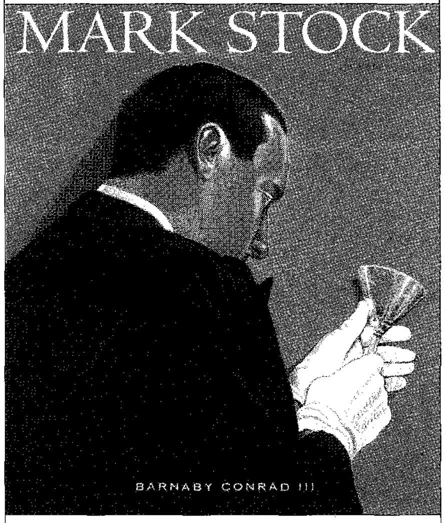
So, she said. Down to business. With a few practiced tugs she pulled off the black gloves she'd been wearing. She shrugged off her jacket and took a printed sheet from the tray on her desk and began to mark various lines with a highlighter. Her fingers were plump and bare of rings. Of course—the gloves. Her blouse was sleeveless, and he was struck by the whiteness of her arms. Elfie—that was her name. Just like that, it came back from wherever it had gone. Elfie. It didn't fit. There was nothing elfin about her, nothing light or elusive. In this little room he could smell her plainly through her perfume, more salt than sour. Her breasts swelled the fabric of her blouse, her arms were heavy and rounded, not fat but full with the fullness of forty-five, fifty years. She had a large, almost coarse mouth. She pursed her lips as she toted up her figures, then pushed the paper across the desk and sat back. You can do better, she said. I can recommend other homes better for you.

His eyes went straight to the bottom of the page. Twenty-three hun-



GUS POWELL, "PROLOGUE" (2000)/ARIEL MEYEROWITZ GALLERY

"THE BUTLER'S IN LOVE!"
MARK STOCK



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dred. He did not let himself blink. I'll think about it, he said.

Grolier and Sons Colonial Memorial Chapel is a full-service home. Everything top-drawer. You want Grandpa buried in a Viking longboat, you come to Grolier and Sons Colonial Memorial Chapel. Don't laugh. I could tell you stories. Now—shame on me! You will forgive me for leaving you high and dry all this time. Orange juice? Evian?

He was about to refuse, but the juice sounded good, and he said so.

Or beer? I have beer.

He hesitated.

Good, she said. I shall join you. She rolled her chair to a small refrigerator in the corner. Water, she said, rummaging. Water, water, water.

Water will be fine.

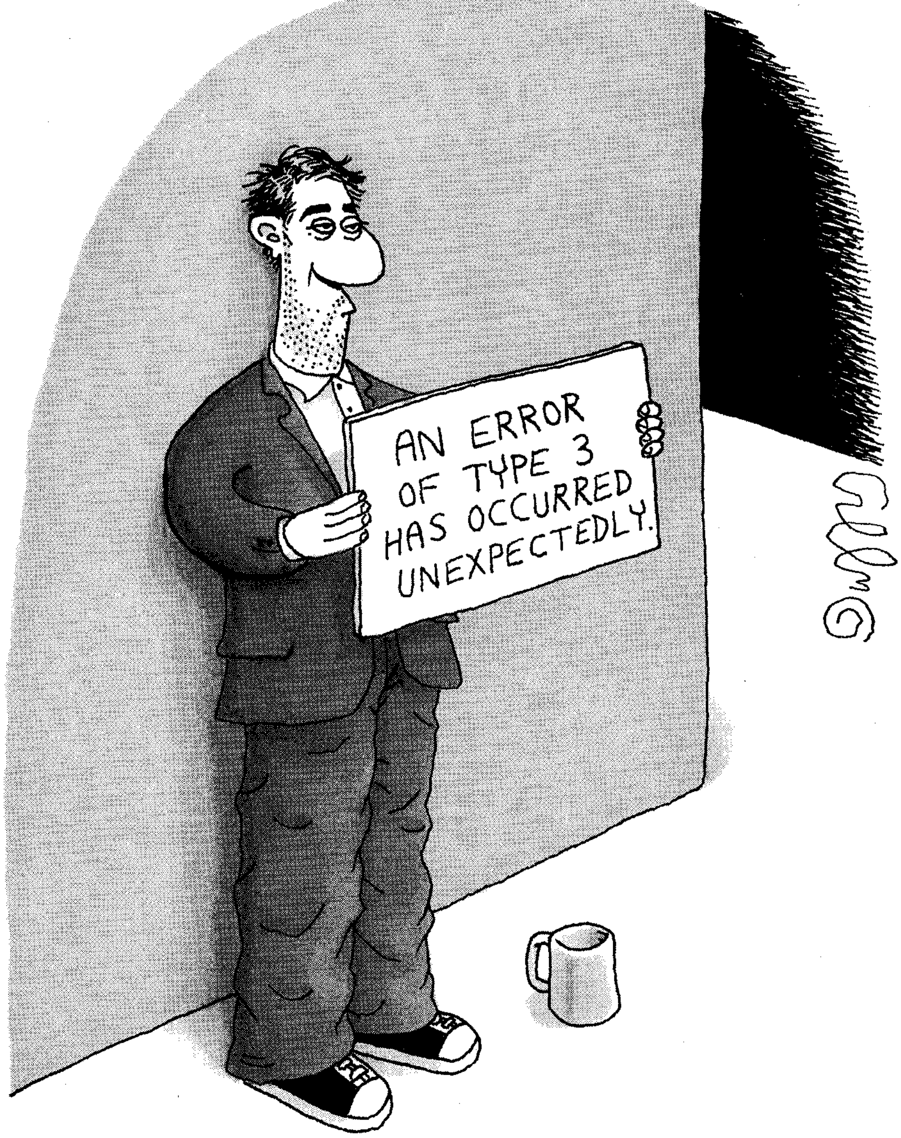
No. Too late for that. Come.

She led him farther down the hall to a large office panelled in dark wood and furnished like a gentleman's club. Oriental rugs. Red leather sofa and chairs, bookshelves filled with leather-bound books. Elfie waved him to a chair. She took a bottle and two tall glasses from a refrigerator built into the wainscoting. She poured the beer with some care, gave a glass to him, and settled herself behind a massive desk covered with photographs in silver frames. *Salut*, she said.

Salut.

She took a long drink and ran her tongue over her lips. Then she bent forward abruptly and turned one of the photographs face down on the desktop.

This is good, he said.



Czech Pilsner. The best.

Are you Czech?

Would you think me Japanese had I given you Asahi? No. I am from Wien. Have you been?

Twice. Beautiful city. He was pleased at knowing that Wien was Vienna.

I suppose you went for the opera.

He was tempted to lie; decided against it. No, he said. I don't like opera.

Nor do I. I find it preposterous. She reached out and turned another photograph over.

So, he said, how did you end up here?

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That's a long story.

Ah—the old Foreign Legion dodge.

She cocked her head and waited.

When you ask a Legionnaire about himself, he always says, *That's a long story.* They tend to have histories that don't bear scrutiny.

As do we all.

As do we all, he said, not unhappy to be thought the owner of such a history.

Were you a Legionnaire?

Me? No.

But you were a soldier. I can tell.

A long time ago.

Oh, a long time ago! You are so old.

Thirty years ago.

It leaves a mark, she said. I can always tell.

Really?

Always.

They talked on in this way, and all the while it seemed to him that they were having another conversation. In this parallel conversation he was saying, *I do like the way you talk*, and she was saying, *I know you do, and what else do you like?* He was saying, *I like your mouth and how you look at me over the glass when you drink your beer*, and she was saying, *I have my momentary weaknesses, and I think you may be one of them, and so?*

He'd sensed this kind of communion before. Now and then, when he was younger, it proved to be not entirely one-sided. He sensed it less often these days, and when he did he tended

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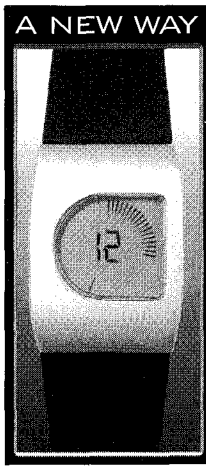

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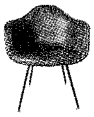

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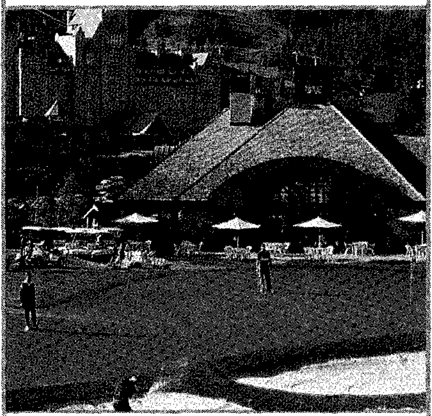

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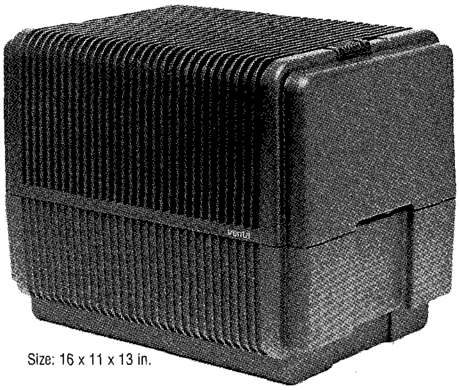

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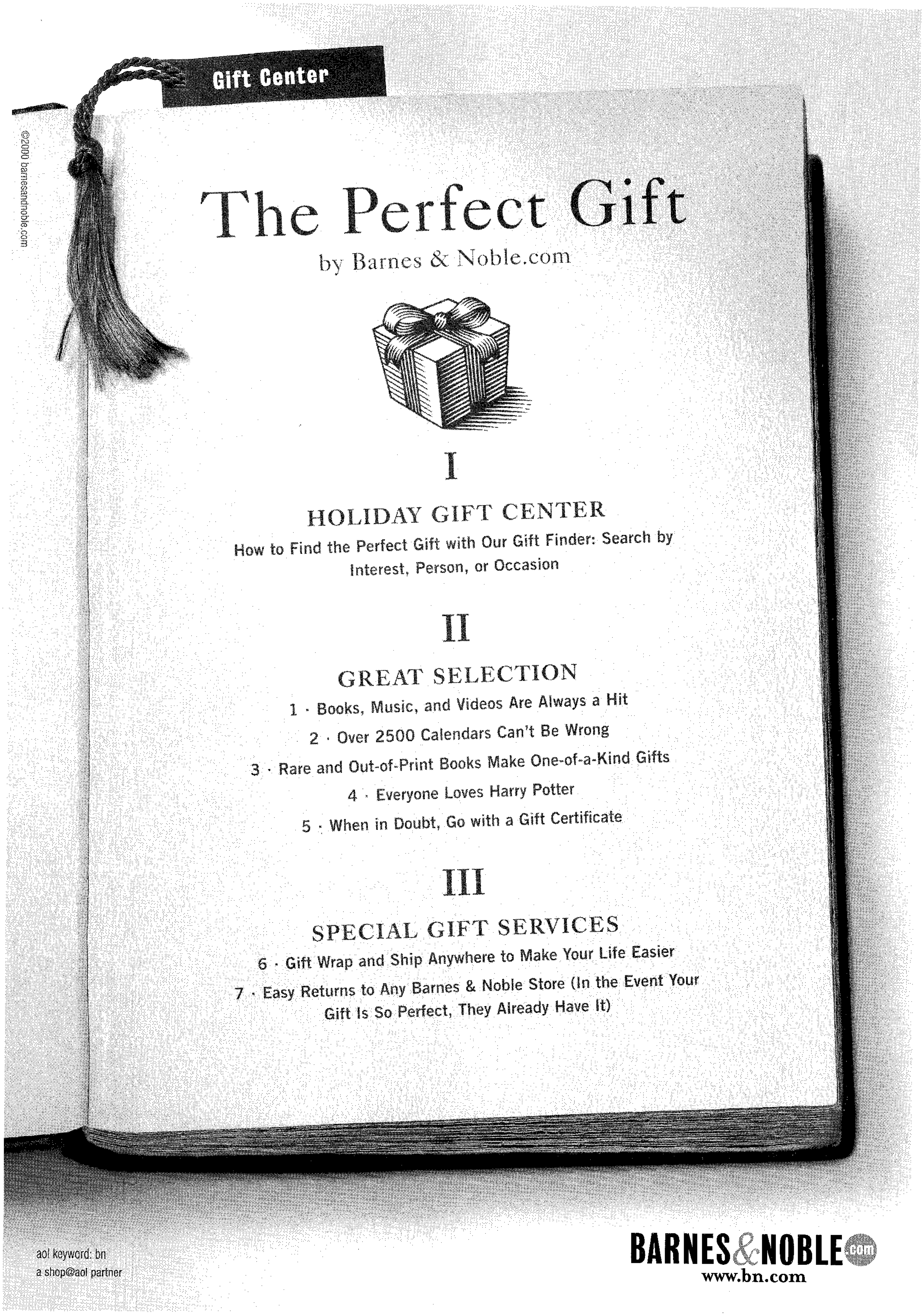
to discount it as wishful thinking. Soon enough, he would ridicule himself for imagining that he'd been an object of desire to this woman, who after all was simply winding down after a long hot day and enjoying—playfully, to be sure—an interest he couldn't conceal.

That's how he'd see it later on, leaving *some* room to wonder, naturally. But in the instant he had no doubt that he was indeed her momentary weakness, that if he stood and took his glasses off she would smile up at him, *Yes, and so?* He had no doubt that if he came around that desk she would stand and meet him with that loose-looking mouth of hers, and sink with him to the floor, onto that nice Bokhara, her hand at his belt, her breath in his ear, *Ah, my Legionnaire!*

And why not! They were both realists, they hated opera, they knew what was waiting for them in another twenty, thirty years, if not tomorrow. Why shouldn't they kick off their clothes and come at each other and make love—no, not make love: fuck!—fuck like champions in the sight of heaven and earth, just because they wanted to, without a thought in their heads but yes yes yes!

All he had to do was take off his glasses and stand up.

Why didn't he, then? All sorts of reasons, no doubt: a long habit of fidelity, if not the actual virtue; the absolute trust of his daughter; perhaps even a childish sense of being watched by the God he lazily believed in. Any of these might have been at work below the horizon of his awareness. What he *was* aware of, all at once, was the irritation of finding himself in a play he disliked; Freud's play. Freud! Why did he have to go and think of Freud? He could just see the Viennese smarty-pants stroking his beard in smug recognition of the part he was playing, abandoning himself to Eros to obliterate his fear of death. The Great Explainer would have a field day with his mortuary lust, his sudden exquisite pleasure in food and drink, the habit he'd formed of fleeing his mother's apartment late at night to cruise down Collins Avenue in a red sports car, watching the girls in their slinky dresses and towering heels



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shimmy and sway as they moved from club to club.

He had, that is to say, a picture of himself playing out the most exhausted and demeaning of clichés. It offended him. It chilled him. He finished his beer, thanked the woman for her time, and shook her soft hand at the office door. He insisted on seeing himself out; that way he wouldn't have her at his back, watching him cross the empty parking lot toward the Miata.

As he approached his mother's apartment he heard raised voices speaking Spanish. Her door was open. No, he thought, no, not while I was gone. But he found her still alive; she didn't die until later that night, while he was down the street eating a plate of fried plantains. At this moment she was thrashing weakly back and forth between Feliz, who looked coldly at him, and an older woman named Rosa. His mother was shouting, the same word: Daddy! Daddy! Her eyes were open but unseeing. Rosa crooned to her in foreign singsong while Feliz tried to hold her hands.

Daddy!

He's here, Rosa said. Your daddy's here.

Daddy!

Rosa raised her eyes to him, pleading.

I'm here, he said, and she fell back and looked up at him. He took Feliz's place beside her on the bed. I'm here, he said, and stroked her hand. It was down to bone.

Daddy?

It's all right. I'm here.

Where were you?

At work.

The room was dim. The two women moved like shadows behind him. He heard the door click shut.

I was alone.

I know. It's all right now.

You're here.

I'm here.

Her fingers tightened on his.

He no longer knew how to be a son, but he still knew how to be a father. He held her hand in both of his. Everything's fine, sweetheart. Everything's going to be fine. You're my own darling, my sweet pea, my good girl.

Daddy, she whispered, and closed her eyes. ♦

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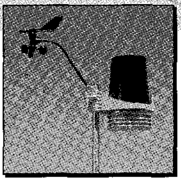

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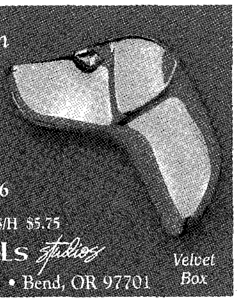

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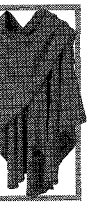

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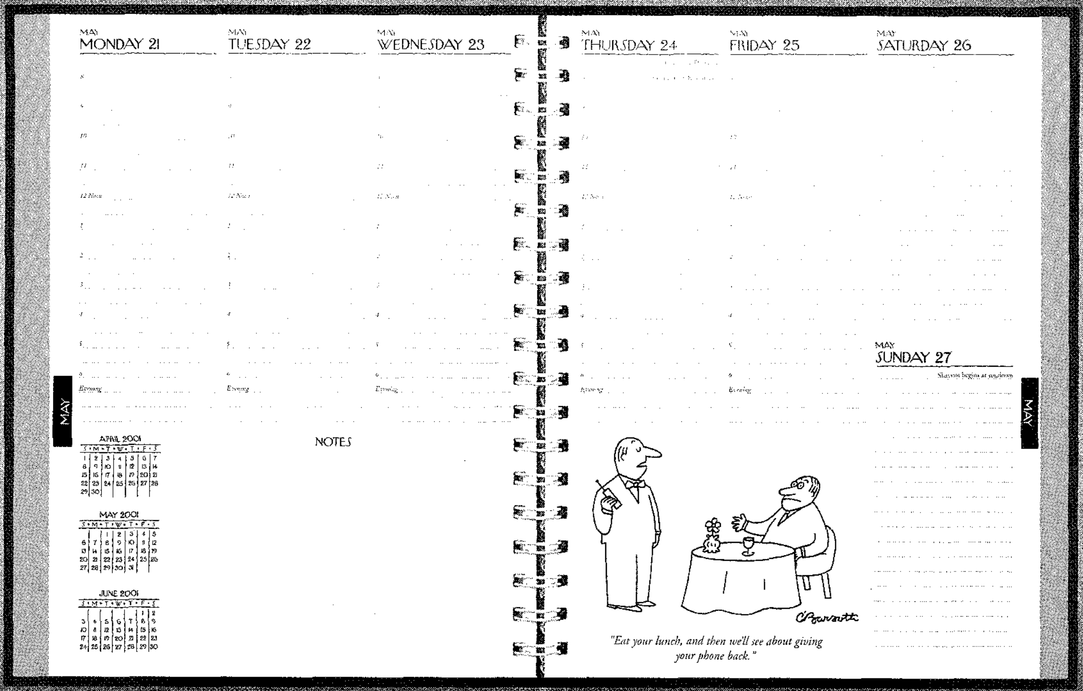
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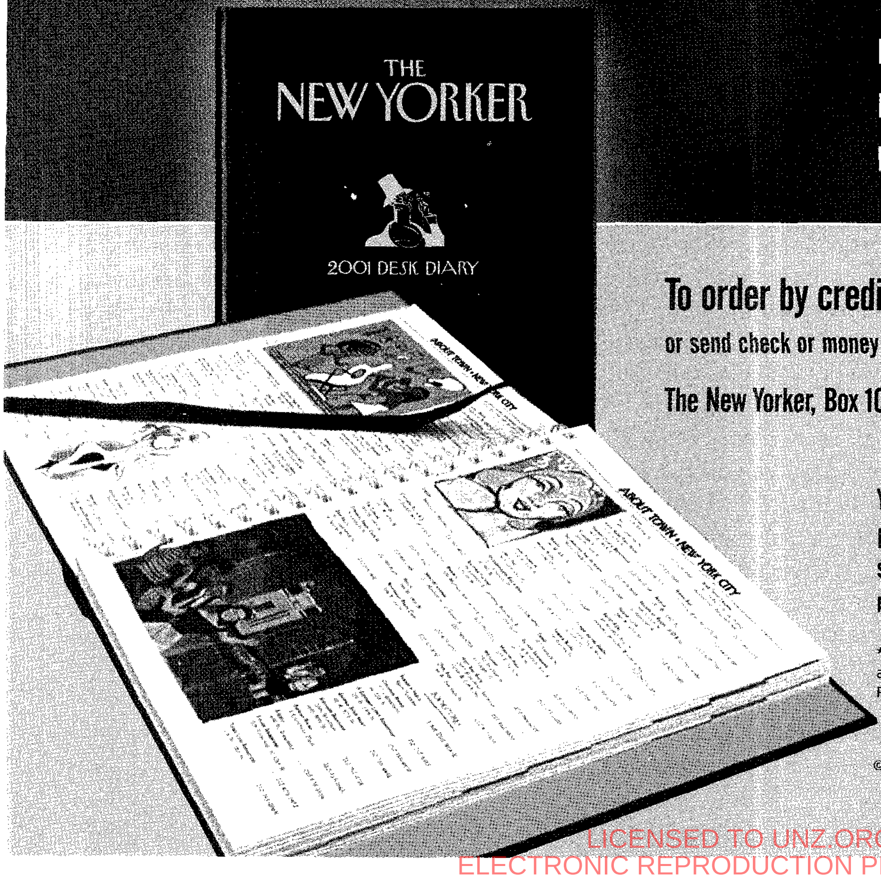
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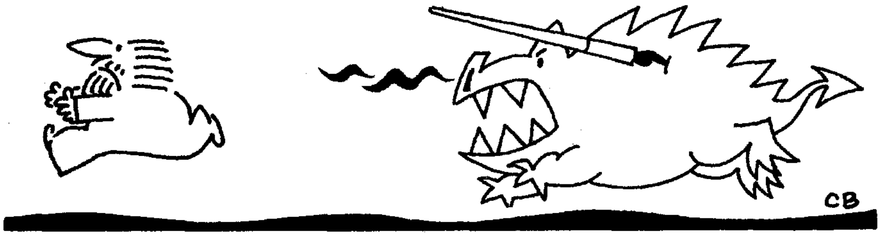


BOOKS

JOHNSON'S BOSWELL

The great biographer gets his own biography.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

Nearly everyone who knew James Boswell liked him a lot. Since he knew nearly everyone worth knowing in the second half of the eighteenth century in Europe, that was a lot of liking to get. David Hume liked him enough to have him at his bedside when he was dying, godless and serene, of cancer. Voltaire liked him so much that, having known him for half an hour, he let him stay in his house overnight and, over coffee at breakfast, gossiped with him about Rousseau. Rousseau's mistress liked him so much that she secretly ran off and spent eleven days in bed with him on the road between Paris and London. Even the Pope—and Boswell was the kind of man who, visiting Rome on the Grand Tour, made sure to call on the Pope—liked him. And, of course, the man who liked the fewest people liked him most of all. "Give me your hand. I have taken a liking to you," Samuel Johnson said to Boswell, about a month after meeting him. There isn't a concordance to Boswell's "Life of Samuel Johnson, L.L.D.," but Johnson, who often said that he had a "regard" or "admiration" or "respect" for someone, does not seem to have said he liked anyone except Boswell.

It's strange that everybody liked Boswell so much, since, knowing him as well as we now do, we see all the things about him that are not very likable. With the discovery of Boswell's journals, in the twentieth century, and their publication, we know that he had not just a weakness for "womanizing" but a need to have furtive sex at a risk to his health and his reputation and his wife's feelings. We know that he was drunk most nights. We know that he loved to go to public hangings, and have sex afterward. We know him top to bottom, and we forgive him heart and soul, just as we do ourselves.

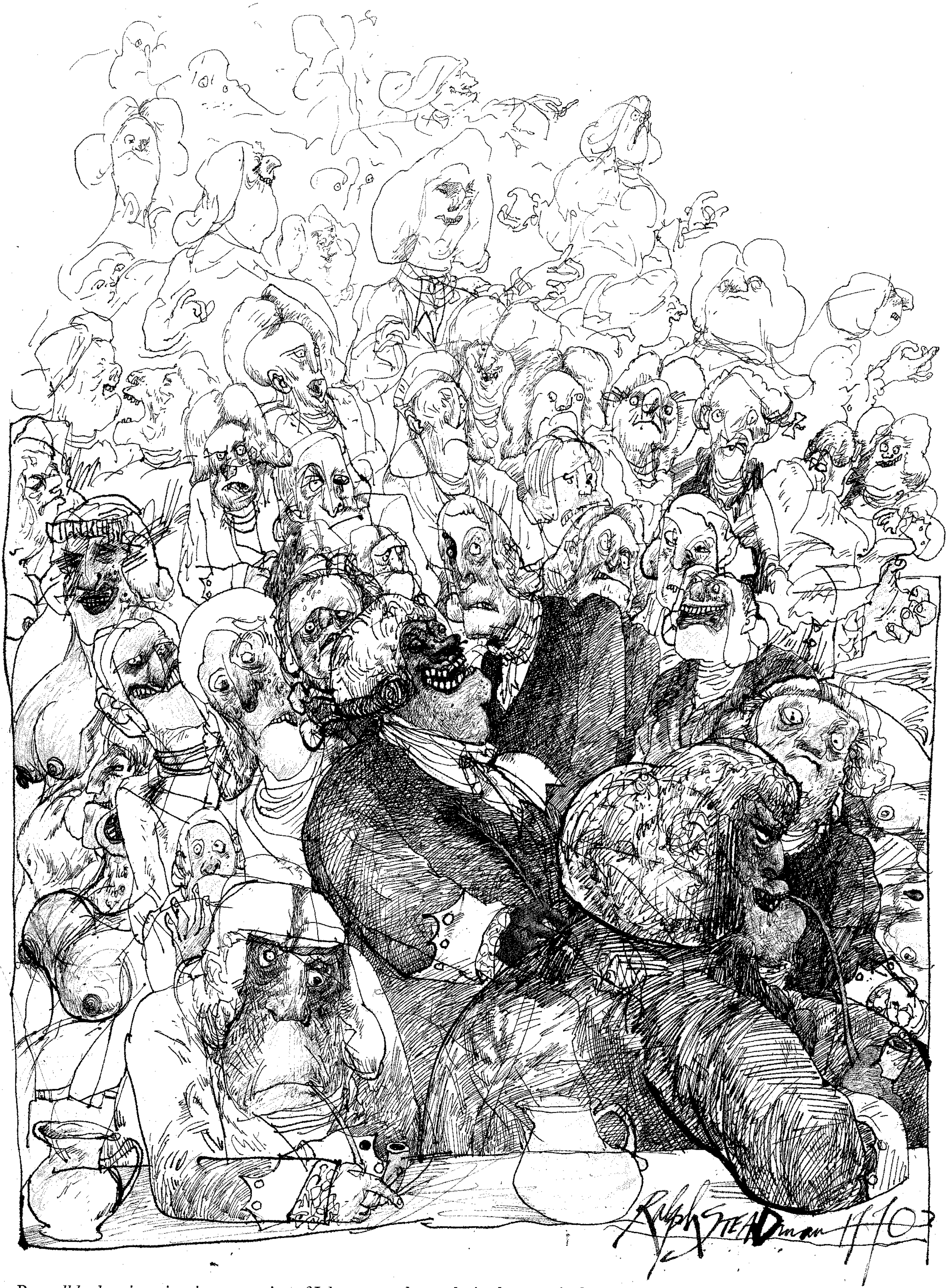
Nearly everyone agrees that his "Life of Johnson" is the best biography in English—Max Beerbohm, not given to hype, thought it was the best book of any kind in the language. Boswell's life is a hard book to write, though, just because Boswell's "Life" is such a good one. In a new biography called, simply, "A Life of James Boswell" (Yale; $35), Peter Martin does a decent, thorough job of getting the story told, picking out the best bits from the journals, paraphrasing them, filling in the blanks.

Martin, though he is good at sorting out the details, is not much good at filling in the bigger picture. The hardest thing for most biographers is to show what it felt like to be inside the subject's skin. Martin has the opposite problem. We know exactly what it felt like to be inside Boswell's skin, but we would like to know what he looked like, fully dressed, from a distance. How many young Brits who called on Voltaire got invited in to see him? More than you might think, or even fewer than you imagined? What did other people think of Dr. Johnson at the moment when Boswell met him? (It's Boswell, after all, who makes us call him "Doctor," in homage to a pretty honorary honorary degree; almost everybody else at the time called him "Mister" or just plain "Johnson.") Was he, like C. S. Lewis, viewed as a man of formidable accomplishment, if narrow opinions, respected even by those who thought him wrong? Or was he more like that other, modern Johnson, Paul—admired by a small circle but thought by most metropolitan opinion to be just too far out and cranky? "Though he was good-natured at bottom, he was very ill-natured at top," Horace Walpole writes somewhere, and you wonder if, without Boswell, *that* is the way you would have seen him, too. Boswell, for his part, understood Johnson not just as a friend understands someone but as a great writer sees him: simultaneously from all sides and from his best angle.

Every writer's life can be summed up, in sequence, by the Four Permanent Titles: "Great Expectations," "A Sentimental Education," "The Way of the World," and, finally, "Lost Illusions." Boswell fits the pattern perfectly. His father was a Scottish laird and judge, with a house in Edinburgh and an ancient, windswept estate, called Auchinleck. He was a cold, well-meaning, intelligent, and distant patriarch. James, his oldest son, could not have been less like him, and he was only a teen-ager when he began to fall in with actors and lecturers and anyone else who had been somewhere and could tell him about it. It was the height of the Scottish Enlightenment, when Edinburgh was called the Athens of the North. For young Jamie, it felt more like the Stockholm of the South—a remote Strindbergian refrigerator.

Boswell escaped from Edinburgh when he was nineteen, shocking his father by running away to London in order to convert to Catholicism, though converting to Catholicism in the seventeen-sixties seems to have been what dropping acid was in the nineteen-sixties: everybody tried it once, even Edward Gibbon. Boswell ended up liking London better than Rome. As the arch-Boswellian Frederick Pottle once put it, "Boswell hobnobbed with the scapegrace young Duke of York; he went up to the spring meeting at Newmarket. . . . He met and was flattered by Laurence Sterne, whose first two volumes of *Tristram Shandy* had made him the literary lion of the moment." He spent most of the rest of his life (he died at fifty-four) trying to find a way to live full-time

RALPH STEADMAN


Ralph STEADman

Boswell had an imaginative conception of Johnson as a hero who is also a comic character—the Falstaff of the intellect.

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in London, and he never managed it.

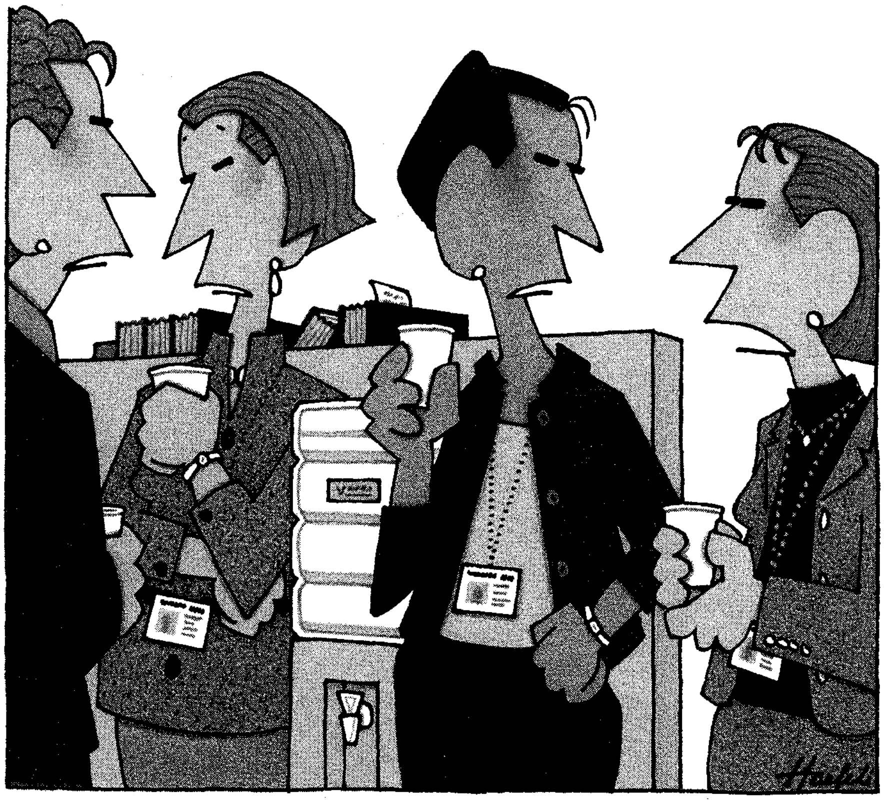
Just three years after that first visit, though, when he was still young and hopeful, he worked up a wild scheme to get himself a commission in the Guards, so that, as a soldier, he would have to live in London. On May 16, 1763, he happened to be drinking tea in the parlor at the back of a friend's bookshop when a large figure appeared behind a translucent glass door and wandered in, and he got the one introduction he wanted most in the world: to the lexicographer, essayist, poet, and hack journalist Samuel Johnson. Martin, disappointingly, just trots by that first meeting, in Thomas Davies' bookshop. Certainly, Johnson was looking as hard for a Boswell as Boswell was looking for a Johnson. Boswell had his "mentors," and Johnson had already taken on a couple of semi-disciples, Bennet Langton and Topham Beauclerk. As disciples, neither of them had quite worked out, for the usual reasons: they liked to listen, but they didn't like only to listen. Boswell did.

His meeting with Johnson, and Johnson's quick adoption of him, was the preface to the most exciting time of Boswell's life—the only exciting time of his life, really. Johnson saw him off on the Grand Tour, and it was during that year that Boswell did most of his meeting of famous men and notorious women, ending up in Corsica, to become, on his return, the spokesman for Corsican independence, the first radical-chic liberation movement of modern times. Afterward, life closed down. He married a cousin, who turned out to be a loving and sexy wife (not that it did her much good), and then spent most of the year as a lawyer in Edinburgh and a few weeks a year as himself, in London.

A small cottage industry exists in which professors tally and re-tally the number of hours that Boswell and Johnson spent together; there is actually a recent scholarly paper called "Boswell's Meetings with Johnson: A New Count." However you add them up, there aren't many. Yet the hours the two men had were very rich. Boswell's book makes it feel as though they shared a life together because in a sense they did; Boswell was only fully alive when he was in Johnson's presence. When he was with Dr. Johnson, people said, he became Dr. Johnson, and though this must have seemed silly if you were there, it meant that he got Johnson's speech patterns imprinted onto his neurons. This is why Johnson's voice rings as a voice in Boswell, in a way that it never does even in the memoirs of people who, hour for hour, knew him a lot better. On the page, Boswell's Johnson sounds more like Johnson than even Johnson sounds like Johnson. Hester Thrale, a brewer's wife and salon keeper, was Johnson's real intimate in those years, and, had she not broken with Johnson at the end of his life, over her remarriage to an Italian music master named Piozzi—the terrible and shameful episode of snobbery and bigotry in Johnson's life—she would have written a better book about Johnson than the tired "Anecdotes" she wrote. But even when she is being affectionate her Johnson doesn't sound like Johnson. To have a good ear, you need to have a weak ego, and that was Boswell. He wanted to *be* Johnson, and he ended up with Johnson right inside him, a lucky Jonah who swallowed his whale.

From the very beginning, Boswell had an imaginative conception of Johnson, different from that of anyone else who knew him, as a hero who is also a great comic character—the Falstaff of the intellect. From Johnson's first appearance in the journals, when he roars at the young Scot ("I come from Scotland, but I cannot help it." "That, I find, is what a great many of your countrymen cannot help"), to his last, when, dying and penitent, he asks a friend to tell him how he sinned, and, on being given texts from the Bible on Christian charity, calls out angrily, "What is your drift, Sir?," the comedy and the heroism are thoroughly mixed. We never laugh at Johnson, but Boswell is sure that we are always laughing around him. In fact, laughter is a sign of goodness throughout the journals and the "Life." "Much laughing" is the only note that remains of one meeting, and Boswell offers it without apology. The most memorable image in the "Life" is not of Johnson talking but of Johnson clutching a post after midnight on a London street and, as he contemplates the absurdity of a friend's will, sending forth "peals so loud that in the silence of the night his voice seemed to resound from Temple-bar to Fleet-ditch."

Although a "Boswell" is supposed in popular language to be a slavish ad-



"I'd love to join you in saying horrible things about men, but I used to be one myself."

• •

mirer—Robert Craft has denied being Stravinsky's Boswell, which he was, for just this reason—in truth Boswell was in many ways on to Johnson from the beginning; he saw what was great and what was silly in him, and loved them equally. (He had "narrowed his mind somewhat too much, both as to religion and politicks," he said frankly.) Boswell had encountered the original thinkers of his time, and in some deep recess of his mind he knew that Johnson was not among them. We love Johnson for refuting Bishop Berkeley's belief that matter does not exist by emphatically kicking a stone and saying, "I refute it *thus*"—but both stone and kick were well explained within Berkeley's system, where they are other kinds of illusions. It is not the system Johnson refutes but the abstract turn of mind that seeks comfort in such systems.

What makes his gift for kicking stones all the more impressive is that he was just as good at counting stars. Boswell's Johnson had both essential intellectual gifts: he could take a specific case and instantly raise it to the level of an abstract principle (of the man who married twice he declared that it was "the triumph of hope over experience"), and he could break down a general proposition to a pungent particular instance ("The great principle which every woman is taught is to keep her legs together"). He can see the point *and* grasp the principle. When Boswell asked him what he would do if he were locked up with a child in a tower, he sighed, but had an instant and intelligent answer (give it a bath), and he was just as practical and shrewd when Boswell asked him what underwear he would put on the women in his seraglio, if he had one (all cotton and linen, no silk).

But he could also elevate the mundane to an area of classical pointedness, as when, given Mr. Thrale's brewery to sell, he announced, "We are not here to sell a parcel of boilers and vats, but the potentiality of growing rich beyond the dreams of avarice." Johnson could be as exact as Orwell and as vast as Chesterton. He could count trees, and see forests. Since these two gifts—for getting down to cases and for seeing the big picture—are the whole of intelligence, and are rarely present in one mind at once, it is fair to

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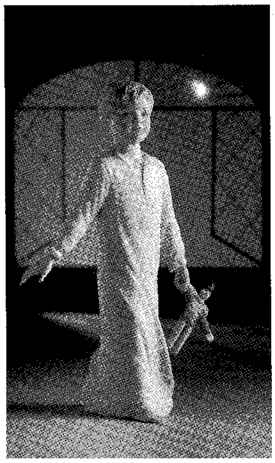

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say that Johnson is as intelligent a man as we have on record.

His greatness depends on his having these two gifts—and his humor, or his place as a figure in a comedy, depends on his having *only* these two gifts. He had none, or very little, of the mid-range of human capacity. He loved clarity and certainty above all things, and in his clear and certain sentences there is something slightly unreal. He can turn vats and boilers into dreams, and dreams into vats and boilers, but he cannot be in the world where most experience takes place, and vats and dreams mingle. The joke lies in his being able to treat experience only in one of those two modes, one after the other. The funniest moment in the "Life" comes when Johnson quickly leaps from plain talk to abstract speech and dares anyone to follow him:

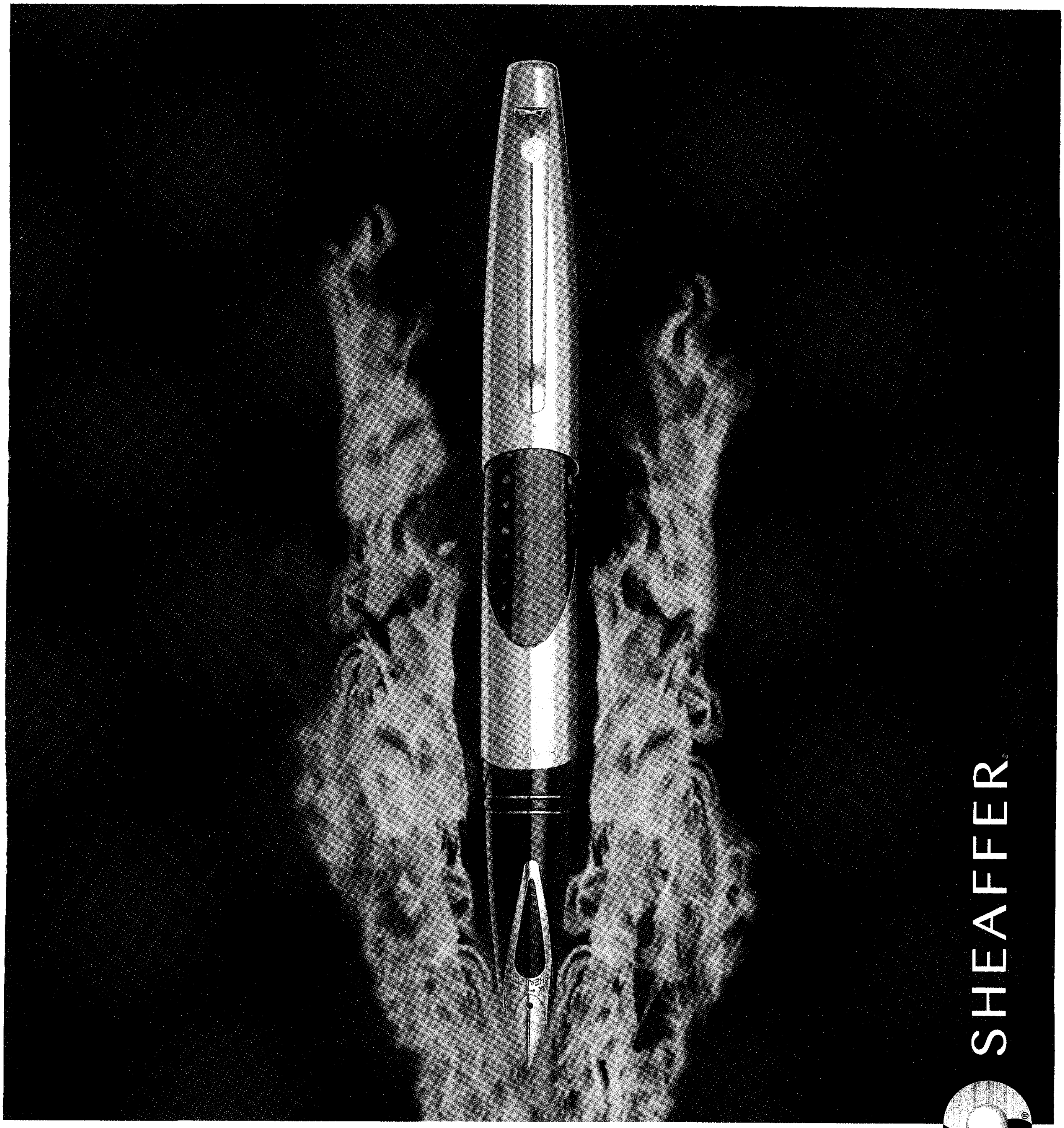
> Talking of a very respectable author, he told us of a curious circumstance in his life, which was, that he had married a printer's devil. REYNOLDS: "A Printer's devil, Sir! Why, I thought a printer's devil was a creature with a black face and in rags." JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir. But I suppose he had her face washed and put clean clothes on her. (Then looking very serious, and very earnest.) And she did not disgrace him; —the woman had a bottom of good sense." The word *bottom* thus introduced, was so ludicrous when contrasted with his gravity, that most of us could not forbear tittering and laughing. . . . His pride could not bear that any expression of his should excite ridicule, when he did not intend it; he therefore resolved to assume and exercise despotick power, glanced sternly around, and called out in a strong tone, "Where's the merriment?" Then collecting himself, and looking awful, to make us feel how he could impose restraint, and as it were searching his mind for a still more ludicrous word, he slowly pronounced, "I say the *woman* was *fundamentally* sensible"; as if he had said, hear this now, and laugh if you dare. We all sat composed as at a funeral.

•

Perhaps it is an uneasiness with comedy, or with imagining a hero as a comic figure, that makes twentieth century biographers and academics so unhappy with Boswell's Johnson. Since the nineteen-forties and the work of Joseph Wood Krutch, there has run a countercurrent maintaining that Boswell's Johnson is not the real thing, and that we need to rescue the lost "radical" Johnson from Boswell's conservative caricature. This movement, which reached a scholarly peak with Walter Jackson Bate's "Samuel Johnson," hit its low point, seven years ago, with Richard Holmes's "Dr Johnson & Mr Savage," a melodramatic attempt to turn Johnson into not just a radical but a proto-Romantic, a nocturnal wanderer along the lines of Baudelaire. (Boswell's Johnson is called a "natural Tory clubman.") Yet it was Boswell who was the quenched radical, if anyone was, the Romantic born before his time. His views on almost every subject are the views of the model proto-Romantic; his obsessions—ghosts, liberty, and sex—are the obsessions of the Shelley circle. Had he been born thirty years later, he would certainly have washed up among the Lakes with Byron and Shelley, and would probably have died in Greece fighting for its independence, as he tried to do for Corsica. If he was not precisely opposed to capital punishment—after all, he attended hangings—he fought for its victims, and took the cases, well, personally, which almost no one else in his circle did. He recognized capital punishment as a pillar of skulls holding up the society, and this haunted him, as it ought to haunt us.

Johnson was for kings, for the power of property where the king couldn't act, against democracy and free votes, for corporal punishment and public hangings. He would have opposed campaign-finance reform, multiculturalism—and to say that he could not have been against these things because he did not have these things to be against is not true, because he did. People said that the Chinese might be as inventive as Europeans; Johnson said they weren't. Lord Monboddo said that we were probably related to monkeys, or at least orangutans, and Johnson said that that was ridiculous. He had X-ray vision about some things—he saw right through the fraud of the pseudo-Gaelic Ossian poems—but the trouble is that people with X-ray vision may think they're seeing bone when they're just looking at a frayed cuff.

It is important to remember all this not to disparage Johnson but to admire him—and for his real virtues, not for some imaginary ones that Boswell is believed to have kept from us. Johnson was a Christian and a conservative, and as firm of the kind as there has ever been. Yet he was not a conservative who reluctantly accepted a little tincture of compassion, like salt around the rim of a margarita. He believed that compassion was the essence of his conservatism, and that the fault of liberalism was not that it



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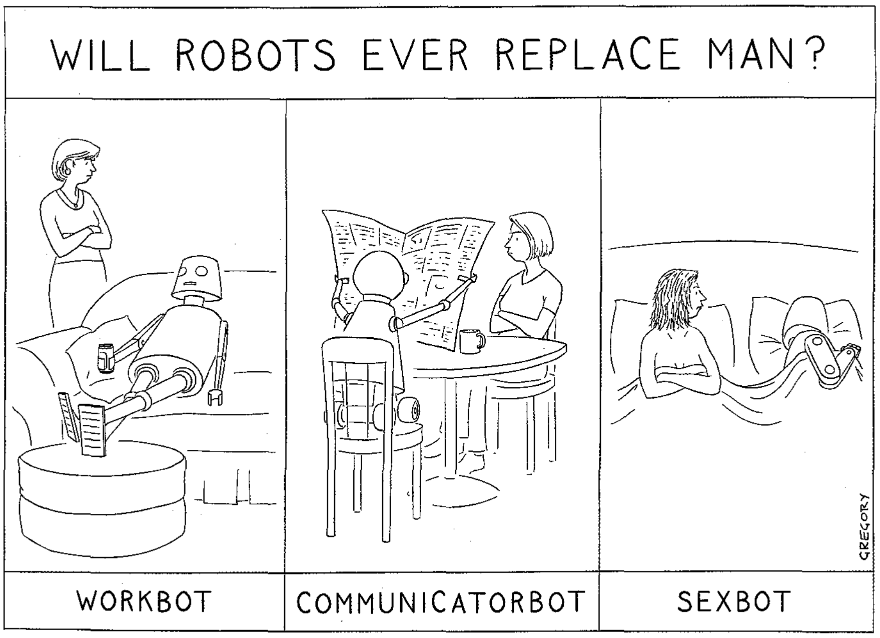
overdid the compassion but that it didn't really do it at all. It was not the economic laissez-faire liberalism that was just coming into being in his time that was flawed. It was the fatuous optimism inherent in the liberal imagination. Even if the playing field were level, the board would still rest on the earth, and the weakness of liberalism is, as Johnson saw it, the refusal to recognize the tragic dimension of life. Nothing except God's grace is going to make life better, and the sooner you figure that out the better off you are.

These were not views he arrived at when he became too comfortable; they were views he arrived at from an inability to be comforted. Johnson believed in things that would make a liberal blush; but he filled his house with the homeless, which should make most liberals blush, too. He would have been against aid to the poor, indignant at anyone who didn't give his parlor to a poor person. He was a friend to conversation, civility, and courtesy, and an enemy of public debate, free speech, and democratic decision-making. The second trio has so completely colonized the first that it is hard for us to think that anyone with a mind could separate them. One of the best arguments for believing that they are different is that Dr. Johnson thought they were.

A biographer writing about a well-known figure these days seeks a single cause to "explain" him, less to distinguish the individual from other individuals than to distinguish his book from those of other biographers. Martin's key to Boswell is "hypochondria," by which is meant not fear of illness but an illness itself, an eighteenth-century version of depression. Boswell was a confessed hypochondriac—he even wrote an imitation of Johnson's "Rambler" essays called "The Hypochondriack"—and drove Johnson almost crazy with his complaining. In fact, it sounds like the same old nervous depression that nearly every writer gets. He was lifted out of himself by talking religion with Burke and Johnson, by appearing as the champion dressed as a Corsican guerrilla, or by screwing a whore under Blackfriars Bridge. "Be not solitary, be not idle," Johnson urged him, citing Robert Burton, and when he was with other people and busy, mostly he was fine. Those things filled up the scared places in his head.

Sadly, the shape of his life after his marriage couldn't have been worse for his complaint. He was shut up in the Edinburgh law courts and, after his father's death, in that cold country house, with almost no one to talk to and a monotonous routine. He found comfort with his children—he had five—and was a doting father. And on his long trip through the Scottish islands with Johnson, and on his trips to London, he was as cheerful a man as could be found. "Who so merry and gay as you in company, though at times gloomy at home," his son wrote him toward the end of his life—for all his difficulties, Boswell won the hardest thing there is to win in life, the unconditional love of his grownup children—and this is the clue that what Boswell suffered from was the kind of anxious exhaustion that comes to convivial people who are in need of other people as a mirror in which to see their better selves. Anyone who is the life of the party dies a little when there isn't one.



Martin is strongest on the part of Boswell's life that is, in retrospect, most miraculous. After Johnson's death, in 1784, everyone knew that Boswell was supposed to write the book he had promised, and his rivals were gleeful at the thought that he would never get it done. Drunk, dissolute, and depressed, though only forty-four, he watched one of Johnson's executors, John Hawkins, beat him, with a dead-as-a-doornail "Life," while Mrs. Thrale came out with her padded collection of letters.

Boswell published his journal of the tour to the Hebrides as a kind of promissory note, and then he went to work. Martin rightly credits Edmond Malone, Boswell's editor, for the book's existence. Malone (the subject of a previous biography by Martin) cajoled, cosseted, and threatened Boswell until the book at last was done. He midwifed a masterpiece, and pretty much invented modern book editing while doing it. Malone hit on a brilliant, simple idea to encourage his halting author. When Boswell got stuck, he had some of what had already been written set in type—the words forced out so desperately and privately suddenly become writing, literature.

But Malone also tried to take the Boswell out of Boswell, encouraging him to cut down the trivia—what Johnson mumbled to his cat, what Johnson said about how to make punch—and to make himself look less obviously a fool. Boswell, with the stubbornness of his strange genius, refused. He believed in his detailed "Dutch" portrait of his hero, and he didn't mind looking like more of an idiot than he really was if it helped Johnson stand out in sharper relief as a genius. When the book came out, in 1791, it was an immediate best-seller, and went into three editions within a decade. No one had ever before written anything so dense with life, and the people who admired it abandoned the re-

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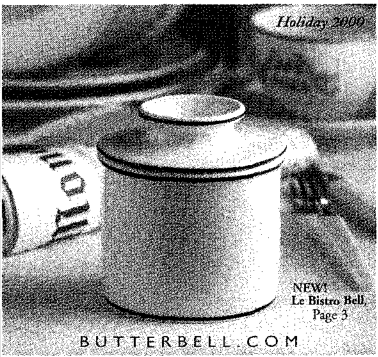

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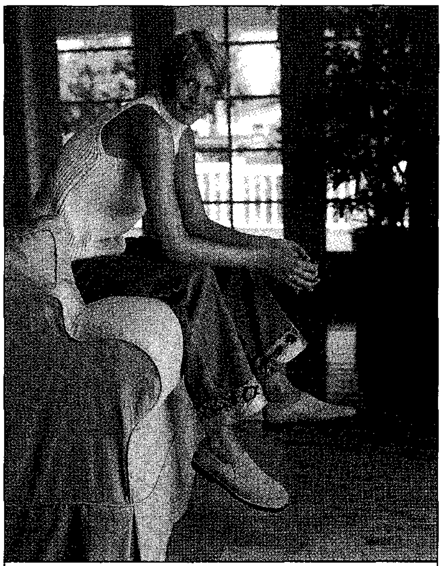

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served vocabulary of neoclassical praise, and said, like Burke, that it was "the most entertaining book" they had ever read. The critics, naturally, attacked it for its virtues—for all the "infinitely minute" details that make it live. And make Boswell a more modern writer than his hero. Johnson, reading Boswell's 1768 "Account of Corsica," saw from the start that he was a first-class natural writer, who looked and listened and saw the telling detail. We know that Boswell worshipped Johnson. It's easy to forget how much Johnson admired Boswell, and with what good reason.

The book's success hardly cheered Boswell up at all, or not enough. "I cannot be contented merely with literary fame and social enjoyments," he wrote to James, Jr., a few months before his death. "I must still hope for some creditable employment, and perhaps I may yet attain it." His good son tried to make him see sense: "They who have obtained places and pension &c have not the fame of having been the biographer of Johnson. . . . They have not been known to Johnson, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Garrick, Goldsmith, &c, &c. They have not visited the patriots of Corsica. In short, would you rather . . . have been a rich, though dull plodding lawyer?" Sadly, yes, he would have, or would have liked to be that, too.

The influence of the "Life" ought to be felt everywhere, but it isn't. Although everyone agrees that Boswell's is the best biography in English, biography proper goes along as if it had never been written: there are few other biographies with living talk or scenes. Even lives seen at first hand tend to be written about as though they had been known secondhand, in order to give a taste of dignity to the subject. Boswell and Boswell's Johnson live on in a couple of strange places. First, and oddly, Boswell lives in the modern detective story. Not only the basic situation but the tone of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, and all their successors, comes right out of Boswell.

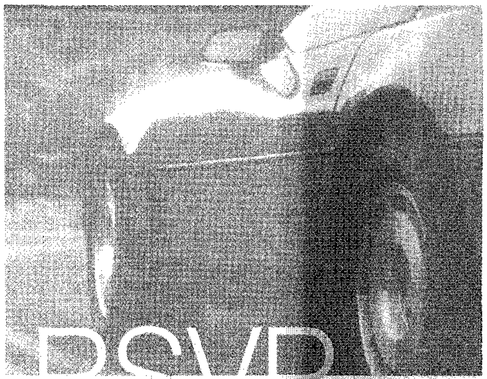
And if Boswell did not change biography proper, he invented biography improper; i.e., the magazine profile. (He would have loved the glossies. After he interviewed Voltaire, he wrote to a friend, "I would send it to one of the best public papers or magazines. But this is probably a flight of my over-heated mind.") From Edward Trelawny's Byron to Lillian Ross's Hemingway, the modern journalist's portrait painting comes right out of Boswell. When an editor sends a writer out to profile someone, what he or she dreams of getting is Boswell's Johnson: a firsthand account of a celebrity, filled out with vivid scenes and dramatic dialogue.

Boswell's "Life" proves that all the ways in which journalism is supposed to diminish literature—the fascinated curiosity about the minutiae of famous people's lives, the love of funny lines and pointed remarks, even the wide-eyed *Tiger Beat*-style of star worship—are among the things that journalism has to offer literature. A more responsible author than Boswell would have censored Johnson's lemon peels and mutterings and absurdities—we have Hawkins's earlier life of Johnson to remind us of just how Johnson would have looked if left to the high style. A more responsible author would certainly have censored his own absurd appearances, too. Boswell, by keeping in both, created something greater than a biography.

His readiness to be embarrassed in the cause of truth to life made him surprisingly subtle. There are few moments in literature more moving than his last view of Johnson:

> Sir Joshua Reynolds's coach was to set us both down. When we came to the entry of Bolt Court, he asked me if I would not go in with him. I declined it from an apprehension that my spirits would sink. We bade adieu to each other affectionately in the carriage. When he had got down upon the foot-pavement, he called out, "Fare you well!" and without looking back sprung away with a kind of pathetic briskness.

All Boswell's writing is pathetically brisk, briskly pathetic. The "either or"s and "and yet"s that eluded Johnson were all of his hope. Contemporary cartoonists drew Boswell clutching the rope on Johnson's boat, as he confessed he had done once in the Hebrides, because they thought it made him look ridiculous. Imagine an author confessing to being so scared and so in need of help! But he knew he needed something to clutch, as do we all. Boswell lives on because he reached out. Johnson gave him his hand, and he held on to it. ♦



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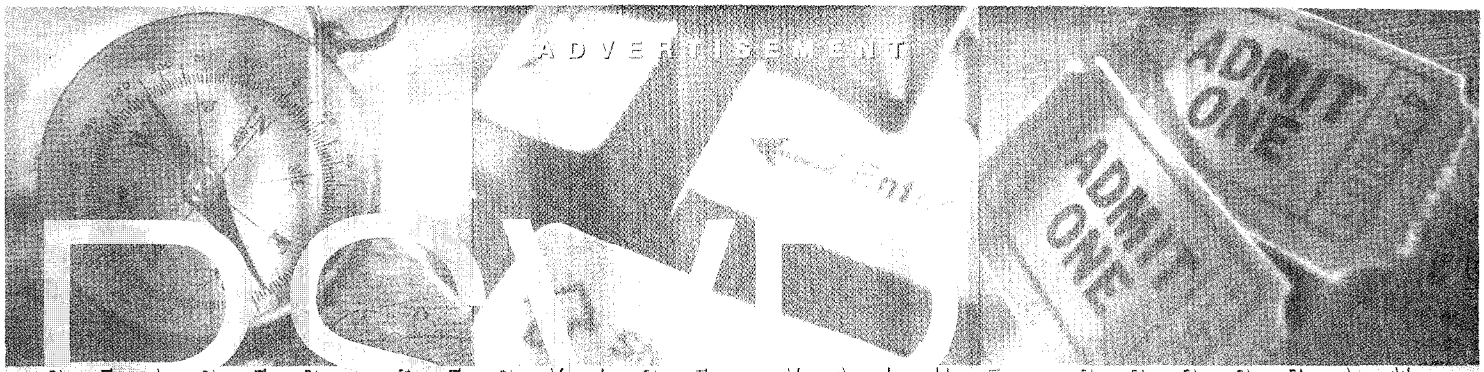

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BOOKS

EDIBLE COMPLEX

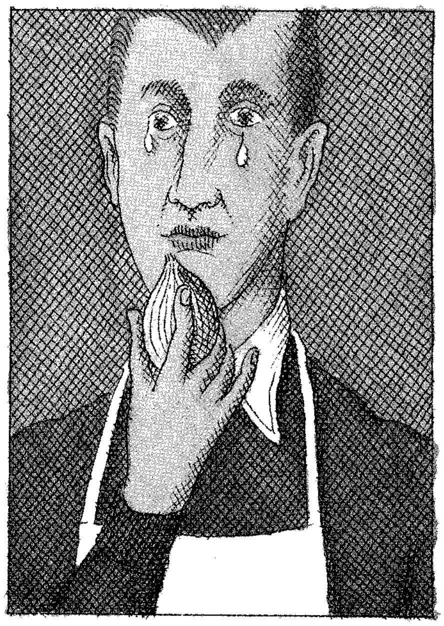
Culinary history, from cannibalism to salsa.

BY JOHN LANCHESTER

Practically anyone who has ever stood at a stove will have been told, at one point or another, to sear a piece of meat at high temperature, in order to "seal in the juices" for a subsequent period of slower cooking. It's good advice for any kind of grilled or roasted meat, and especially for steak; that way, you get a crunchy, semi-burned, almost crusty outer layer of meat, yielding to the redder, juicier, softer inside. The trouble is that from a scientific perspective the sealing-in-the-juices stuff is nonsense. A study done at the University of Missouri in 1930 showed that meat cooked at a constant temperature loses less moisture than meat that is given an initial searing to "seal in the juices." Seared steak is less juicy, not more. Anyone who tells you different—a trusted cookbook, a beloved grandmother—is wrong.

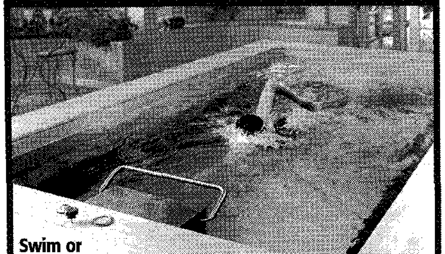
This troublesome fact about cooking meat was made widely known by Harold McGee's great 1984 work, "On Food and Cooking." McGee's was a systematic attempt to examine the physics and the chemistry of what happens in the kitchen. Much of the received wisdom about cooking turned out to be untrue. (And one or two old saws were proved correct: whipping egg whites in a copper bowl, for instance, really does help them hold their shape, since copper ions have a stabilizing effect on egg whites.) "On Food and Cooking" was the book the world had been waiting for ever since Samuel Johnson threatened, or boasted, that he could "write a better book of cookery than has yet been written; it should be a book upon philosophical principles."

That book took an astonishing two centuries to be written, not least because of the unexpected complexity of the science involved in even quite simple culinary processes. (From the busy cook's point of view, some of this stuff should be on a need-to-know basis. "According to one study, a custard cooked by immersing the dish in boiling water thickened at 190°F (88°C) and curdled at 195°F (91°C)." Now go try and cook one.) Another reason it took so long—a difficult reason for outsiders to credit fully—has to do with the partitioning of subject areas in academia. In the university, there has been no such discipline as Food. When Margaret Visser, a classicist at the University of Toronto, became curious one day in the early seventies about why onions make you cry when you chop them, she did some preliminary research and found that she "would have to search in at least eleven different collections of books and read articles in scientific periodicals, journals of anthropology, sociology, and folklore, histories of religion, culinary-historical writings in various journals, business and trade magazines." All this research culminated in her 1986 summa, "Much Depends on Dinner."



PIERRE LE-TAN

Since those two pioneering works were published, in the mid-eighties, food has become, intellectually speaking, hot. This isn't surprising: it sometimes seems as if the Western world



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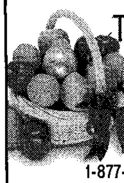

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had spent the last fifteen or so years on a huge binge, not just in its kitchens and supermarkets and restaurants and delis but also in its bookshops and on its TV screens, magazine racks, and wherever else people gather to sell things to one another. We might expect a trend on that scale to spill over and affect pointy-heads, and so it has. The movement has reached an apotheosis with the publication of the two-volume, two-thousand-double-column-page, two millionish-word "Cambridge World History of Food" (Cambridge; $150), edited by Kenneth F. Kiple and Kriemhild Coneè Ornelas, which gathers together the work of a hundred and sixty mainly academic contributors whose specialties range "from the anthropological to the zoological" by way of most of the -ologies in between. If nothing else, this volume—a followup to the authoritative "Cambridge World History of Human Disease"—shows that food has finally and irrefutably become an intellectually reputable object of study.

It's hard not to feel a giggly kind of pleasure at the full extent of knowledge on display in the "Cambridge World History of Food" and also in the majestic "Oxford Companion to Food" (Oxford; $60), edited by the legendary food guru Alan Davidson, and weighing in at a comparatively lightweight eight hundred and ninety-two triple-column pages. The stereotype difference between the two universities is that Oxford is more worldly, more eager to amuse, likelier to produce poets and prime ministers (Shelley, Auden, Thatcher, Blair); and Cambridge is more abstruse, more rigorous, more correct, and likelier to produce philosophers and scientists (Newton, Darwin, Rutherford, Wittgenstein). The books bear this out to an almost comic degree—it's apparent even in their titles. From the Oxford Companion, we learn that Darwin once ate a puma and found its meat to be "very white and remarkably like veal in taste"; from the Cambridge History, we learn that "the confusing nomenclature of the B vitamins can only be understood historically," and that "the Aztecs ate the arms and legs of their sacrificial victims with a *chimole* sauce, made with chili peppers, tomatoes, wild onions (xonacatl) and salt," ingredients that were "nearly the same as that of

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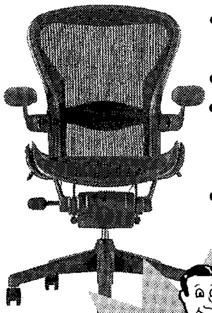

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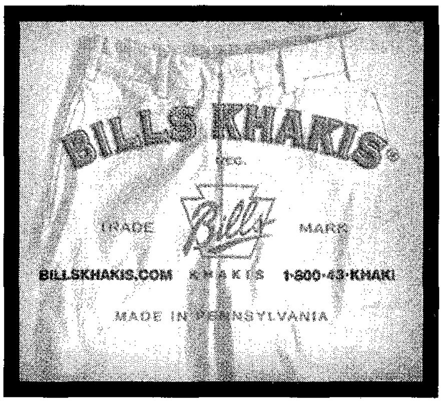

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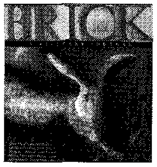

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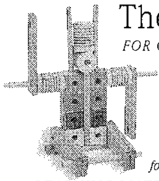

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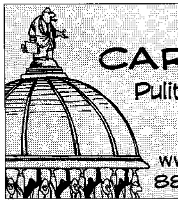

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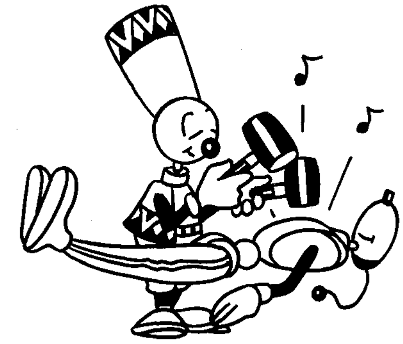
salsa mexicana, in use in most Mexican homes today." The Oxford Companion makes the reader smile, whereas the Cambridge History makes him feel like Hannibal Lecter.

However, there is also a story in the Cambridge History. It might be thought that the history of man's relationship with food was a subject so broad in its geographical and historical sweep, so engrossing in its details and vast in its ramifications, that it was wholly unsummarizable; that no single plotline would emerge. But it turns out that man's relation to food does follow a startlingly straightforward narrative, one that hinges on a single set of linked events that took place around ten thousand years ago: the "Neolithic revolution." Until then, human beings, who have been on the planet, in a variety of forms, for a few million years, had bumbled along, eating what they could find. (We began to hunt animals systematically about seven hundred thousand years ago, and had got very good at it by about a hundred thousand years ago. By that point, our ancestors' brains were the same size as ours.) For the overwhelming majority of our time on the planet, therefore, we have been hunter-gatherers. Then, about ten thousand years ago, came the most important event in the history of our species: the Neolithic revolution, or the switch from hunting and gathering to agriculture. This entailed sedentism (that is, staying in one place) and, eventually, the development of cities and civilizations—the complex web of interdependent discoveries that lead forward, in a more or less straight line, to "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire." The Neolithic revolution happened not in a single place but in several places at about the same time, and it completely changed the fate of our species and the face of our planet.

That's not to say that it was unequivocally a good thing. About the only reliable law of academia is that anything taken as the received wisdom in any given field will sooner or later be overturned. In the case of our hunter-gatherer ancestors, the standard view used to be that their lives were, in the immortal words of Hobbes, "nasty, brutish, and short." A good day would involve scrabbling together a few nuts and berries or successfully bopping a mammoth on the head. A bad day would involve dying of malnutrition or in childbirth, or being eaten by a sabre-toothed tiger. But this view has undergone radical revision. It turns out that Paleolithic man was in almost all respects better off than his descendants, right until the past century. To take only one example, we tend to think of our ancestors as shorter than us and to an extent this is true, but during the Paleolithic Age *Homo sapiens* was fully the same height as we are today.

The switch to agriculture brought with it "decline in stature and health, along with soaring rates of anemia and infant and child mortality," the Cambridge History explains. The reasons are complicated, but they come down to the fact that hunter-gatherers ate lots of different things—as many as they could get their hands on—whereas agricultural man tended to specialize in particular crops, and then eat too much of them. The three great superfoods, domesticated by our ancestors in the Neolithic revolution, were rice, wheat, and maize. But rice inhibits the activity of Vitamin A; wheat has a chemical that impedes the action of zinc and can lead to stunted growth; maize is deficient in essential amino acids and contains phytates, which prevent the absorption of iron. (The archeological record shows extensive evidence of all the resultant maladies.) In addition, a staple food supply gave rise to explosive population growth, which provided superb opportunities for the development of infectious diseases, as did another feature of the Neolithic revolution, the increasing domestication of animals. (Just consider a couple of the greatest hits: flu from pigs, smallpox from cows.) Furthermore, sedentism meant that people lived in close proximity to their own waste by-products, which was great news for parasites. No wonder hunter-gatherers were better off.



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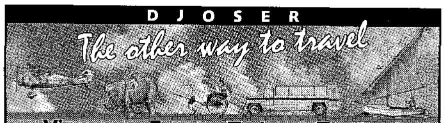

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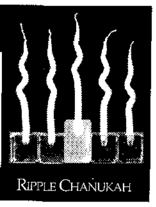

If this idea seems too strange to embrace, don't forget that "it has been estimated that fully 90% of all those who have lived on earth have done so as hunter-gatherers." We post-Neolithic sedentist types are the odd ones out.

This story—an apparent advance that turns out to be a retreat—is the leitmotiv of man's relationship with food: "Every important agricultural breakthrough thus far has, at least temporarily, produced unhappy health consequences for those caught up in it." The "Cambridge World History of Food" tells an oddly downbeat, pessimistic tale, one that sounds a clear warning about the future, and about the potential change in food brought by biotechnology, which people assume will be "the most important scientific tool to affect the food economy in the history of mankind." My principal beef with this is not the over-all moral of the work but its remorselessly exclusive insistence on the scientific. The Cambridge History tells you that onions are a member of the lily family, that planting four rows of onions between two rows of tomatoes provides a thirty-six-per-cent-higher tomato yield, that "the antihyperglycemic principle in onions has been tentatively identified as 2-propenyl propyl disulfide"—but it doesn't tell you that onions make you cry. We have come full circle since Harold McGee's "On Food and Cooking." Now, as we stand on the brink of a revolution in food technology, we need to be reminded that food is not primarily a form of medicine; that the story of mankind and food can be reduced to science, but it is not primarily about science; that man's relationship with food is, and always has been, a terrible and passionate drama. We can't talk seriously about food without talking about what we think we are doing, as well as what it looks like we are doing. Food is never without meaning. Searing a steak to "seal in the juices" may not do anything to seal in the juices, but the truth is, searing makes meat *taste* juicier. When it comes to food, science can be wrong, even when it's right. ♦

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From the Raleigh (N.C.) News&Observer.

"Any airport without air service is at an extreme disadvantage," said Charles Hayes, an economic developer who heads the Research Triangle Regional Partnership.

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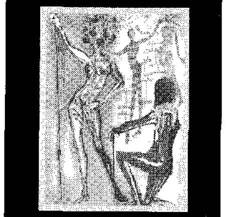

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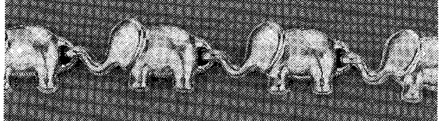

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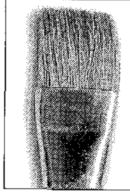

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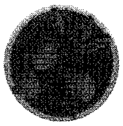

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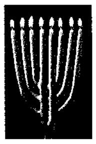

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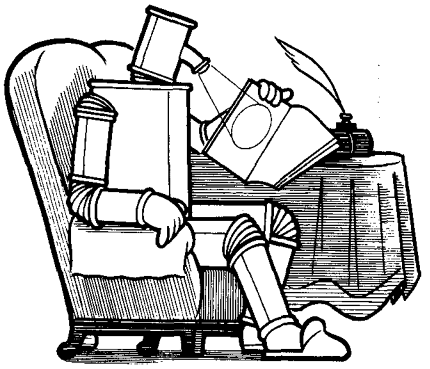
An idiosyncratic list of some of our favorite on-line haunts.



Information Please
www.infoplease.com
Enthusiasts of the on-line Encyclopædia Britannica may claim that the Internet needs no other reference works. Not so. Information Please isn't Britannica, and its databases can't approach the Marianas-like depth of the venerable encyclopedia. But if you need quick access to a dictionary, almanac, or atlas, bypass Britannica for Information Please. The site has daily news and weather, a special section for kids, and a satisfying collection of capsule biographies that span entertainment, sports, politics, and more. Where else can you find Albert Achilles, André Masson, and Bernie (Boom Boom) Geoffrion all under the same roof?

Downside's Deathwatch
www.downside.com/deathwatch.html
Following last summer's fuckedcompany.com, a host of sites sprang up to toll the bell for businesses that had exhausted their venture capital. This page—part of a larger site devoted to market-related pessimism—offers a less giddy variation on the same theme; it uses S.E.C. reports to calculate the date when a company's cash flow will peter out. By Downside's calculations, the search engine AskJeeves.com will run out of money in April of next year, and the digital-music giant MP3.com in May. Still, poisoning the well is a tricky business. Remember Mithridates: he died old.

Learn 2
www.learn2.com
Offhand, it's hard to think of many adults who don't know how to tie their shoes, though there must be a few slothful millionaires who have had a life filled with expensive loafers and the occasional servant-assisted Nike experience. But probably plenty of otherwise responsible citizens haven't yet mastered the art of tying a Windsor knot or the science of changing a flat tire. That's where Learn2.com comes in: the site offers hundreds of short illustrated essays that explain the ins and outs of everything from first aid to financial planning. And though Learn2.com's front page is dominated by the company's for-profit businesses, true autodidacts should search for the free courses, both the aforementioned "2torials" and shorter primers dubbed "Learnlets."

Funschool
www.funschool.com
If a kid designed a Web site, it would look something like Funschool, whose front page is filled with bright-colored icons, and whose content consists largely of games. But it's not exactly Pleasure Island. These games are educational in nature, designed to reinforce basic reading and mathematical skills. With age-appropriate content that targets kids from four to twelve, Funschool does serve dessert after all the spinach, in the form of an Arcade full of less pedagogical games, including Kite Flight (pilot kites through the sky), Bubble Ball (a surprisingly addictive basketball-like entertainment), and checkers (self-explanatory).

Biztravel
www.biztravel.com
Most on-line travel sites focus on consumer travel. But who will speak out for the beleaguered business traveller, forced to leave behind his loved ones and jet senselessly between points A and B? Biztravel.com offers basic information on the world's major cities (topics covered include banking hours, convention schedules, restaurant listings, etc.), advice on managing frequent-flier miles, and essays on everything from travel technology to the medical dangers (specifically, blood clots) associated with spending long hours shoehorned into a coach-class airplane seat.

History of Mathematics

www-groups.dcs.st-and.ac.uk/~history

Having a hard time figuring the tip in a restaurant? Take heart. The ancient-Greek mathematician Thymaridas had trouble with figures, too—although, to be fair, he was trying to solve simultaneous linear equations, and he was working back in the fourth century B.C., well before calculators and laminated tip tables. The superb MacTutor History of Mathematics Web site, hosted by the University of St. Andrews, in Scotland, has essays on various topics that have perplexed mathematical minds for millennia, including the three canonical problems of ancient-Greek mathematics—squaring the circle, doubling the cube, and trisecting an angle. The essays are diverting, but they are dwarfed by the site's collection of historical biographies, which reveals that Thymaridas was working in a world rich with mathematicians, including the prolific Eudoxus of Cnidus, who focussed on matters of proportion and planetary orbit, and a Chalcidic doctor's son by the name of Aristotle.

Guide de la Radio et des Médias

www.comfm.com

Sure, the Internet may one day transform the film industry, the publishing industry, and even the transportation industry. In the meantime, you might want to celebrate the fact that the Internet has already transformed the radio industry. Rather than depend on the limited range of the airwaves, stations across the world are beginning to broadcast on-line. This Web-media index also lists Web-based TV stations and Webcams, but radio is the real draw, with almost five thousand stations in pop, jazz, classical, talk, sports, and every other genre imaginable.

Lyrics World

www.summer.com.br/~pfilho

The next time a pop song is on the tip of your tongue, dislodge it with a visit to this site, which maintains a comprehensive list of all Top 40 hits from 1930 to 1999, along with links to the songs' lyrics. While younger music fans may have a hard time justifying the mediocre chart-toppers of the last few years, boomers will swoon at the opportunity to recover the anthems of their youth ("Some folks inherit star spangled eyes, / Ooh, they send you down to war"). The most interesting part of the site is its prewar material, which documents the heyday of crooners like Bing Crosby, Guy Lombardo, and Rudy Vallee, and the birth of the sappy ballad; such songs as "Betty Coed," "Sweet and Lovely," and "Little White Lies" routinely topped the charts more than once in the same year, with versions by different singers.

Healthfinder

www.healthfinder.gov

The United States may not have universal health care any time soon, but the federal government hasn't exactly been sitting on its hands when it comes to promoting your well-being. Some of the most impressive advances have come on-line, in the form of vast public databases that collect information on disease prevention, treatment, and research. Healthfinder unites selected federal health databases and includes a simple search form; whether you're interested in prenatal care or a rare genetic condition like Freeman-Sheldon Syndrome, you'll get a basic description as well as links to sites with more detailed information. The low-tech home page offers shortcuts to the most popular topics (flu, AIDS); connects to special sections for seniors, teens, and women; and emphasizes prophylaxis through fitness and nutrition.

Find a Grave

www.findagrave.com

Are the unique powers of the Internet best articulated through large, general-interest libraries or extremely specialized databases? The latter half of the argument gets a big boost here: Find a Grave collects basic information on thousands of final resting places. Want to visit the grave of the beer magnate Fred Pabst? Head out to the Forest Home Cemetery in Milwaukee. Obsessed with Frances Farmer? She's buried in Oaklawn Memorial Gardens in Fishers, Indiana. The site isn't limited to Americans: it not only lists Franz Kafka's grave site in Prague but gives walking directions from the cemetery gate. Burial locations are helpfully cross-listed by city and cemetery; if you're at the Pabst grave, you may want to pay your respects to the actress Lynn Fontanne, or to William A. Davidson, the co-founder of the Harley-Davidson motorcycle company.

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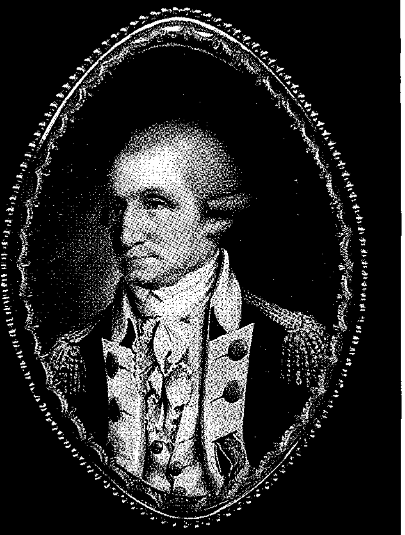

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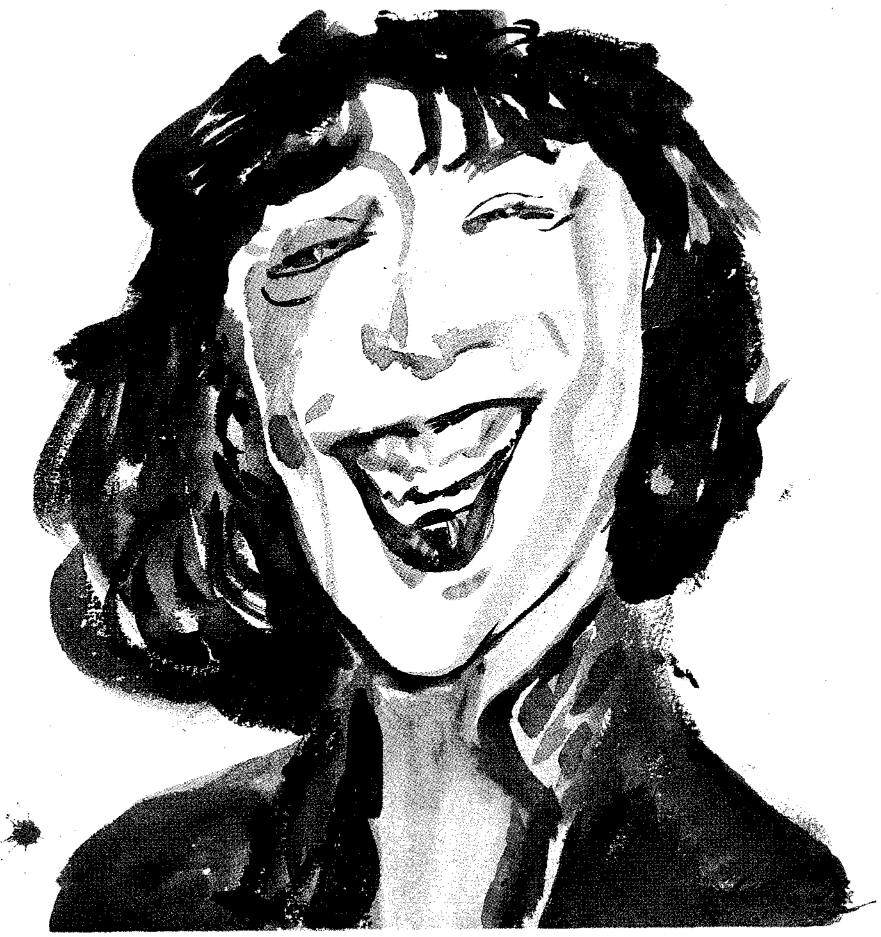
LILY IN BLOOM

Intelligent life returns to Times Square.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

In the thirty years since Lily Tomlin became a star on "Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In," I have never heard a single person express anything for her but unqualifed love. It even sounds negative to say that there's no reason *not* to adore her, because it implies that you've looked for one. And why would you do that? Tomlin radiates integrity without sanctimony, and a reserved, gracious warmth; and her comedy lacks even a hint of psychic neediness or desperation. She has always treated her characters well—as ends in themselves, not as stepping-stones on the way to getting something for herself, except a living. She has never traded them in (the Bell System offered her half a million dollars in the early seventies to do a series of commercials as Ernestine, the switchboard operator, and she said no) or diminished them by overinflating them, the way many "Saturday Night Live" performers have done, shoving their creations into one sorry movie after another. (And of course these tinny comedic vehicles have almost invariably proved to be death traps.) Tomlin's characters on "Laugh-In" were caricatures, and yet they had just-right, life-size proportions; they had traits that we instinctively recognized as genuine, and we embraced and cherished their humanity. Back then, Tomlin said of her characters, "I don't necessarily admire them, but I do them all with love." When she performed them, they brought a sparkle—that famous Tomlin sparkle—to her eye. We couldn't help loving them, too, in an almost parental way: they were inspired reminders that everybody was once somebody's baby.



A baker's dozen of misfits are born again in the revival of Lily Tomlin and Jane Wagner's "The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe."

PHILIP BURKE

We may feel even more protective of the characters currently peopling the stage of the Booth, in the revival of "The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe," who were first seen on Broadway in 1985. Not all of the baker's dozen of misfits are as immediately winning as, say, Ernestine or Edith Ann—certainly not Agnus Angst, an enraged, abandoned adolescent; or Kate, a well-heeled snoot suffering from "rich people's burnout," or "affluenza"—but they are all to some degree in need. Except for Trudy, a New York bag lady, who, since having a breakdown, has been happily divorced from reality, which she dismisses, in the show's most famous line, as "nothin' but a collective hunch." Trudy, like all the characters onstage, is the product of Tomlin's collaboration with the writer Jane Wagner, who has been her partner for many years; Wagner did some revising for this production, which she also directed, trimming here and there and excising certain references that no longer have much edge or humor (such as Geraldine Ferraro campaign buttons), but it is essentially the same work—and Tomlin, now sixty-one, is just as remarkable and vibrant in it as she was fifteen years ago. If anything, her characterizations are better—a little grittier, a little less tinged with whimsy.

As before, the show is shaped around Trudy, whose territory is Times Square but whose mental wanderings take in the entire universe. (Sound effects such as car horns fill in the blanks of place on the mostly bare stage, and also serve, sometimes hilariously, as aural props—a sloshy waterbed, a many-zippered jumpsuit.) In addition to being friends with the earthly hookers in her neighborhood, she has been acting as a "creative consultant" to some extraterrestrials on the fact-finding mission that gives the show its title, and when we first encounter her she is waiting for her "space chums" to arrive. Trudy was the character I remembered best from fifteen years ago, and I had mixed feelings about seeing a happy homeless woman depicted on a Broadway stage at a time when homelessness was—as it still is—a crushingly real problem in this city. The portrait, I thought, pandered to sentimental notions of wisdom and authenticity while neglecting true-life politics. This time around, I felt sentimental myself for Trudy's world, which at least was a world of connectedness, both cosmically and locally. Since then, her neighborhood has itself undergone a kind of shock treatment: if Trudy were to trundle over to Nathan's Famous for a hot dog with her space chums now, she'd find instead a six-story Nasdaq billboard that screams at your eyes, and she'd have quite a time puzzling out why the aliens of the National Rifle Association are opening a gift shop in her back yard.

Because Wagner's observations in "Signs" are so trenchant, you can't help wishing that she had taken up the challenge of creating some new characters for this production. Although Tomlin's performance is fresh, the show has a somewhat dated, swingin'-to-the-oldies feel: there's Chrissy, the self-improvement addict, doing aerobics at a health club; Lyn, who's getting a divorce and selling off her geodesic dome and flotation tank; and Marge, the feminist florist who commits suicide by hanging herself with a macramé plant holder. Paul, a wistful middle-aged guy, says that he misses the disco scene: "I feel about the disco days what hippies must feel about Woodstock." Little does he know, from his 1985 vantage point, that both disco and Woodstock will come back—twice. In many ways, though, the show remains brilliant, and Tomlin is, as always, a revelation. It's a pleasure to see her in flower, to watch a performer whose comic world view arises not from a sense of deprivation but from a sense of generosity and fullness.

Harold Pinter's 1978 play "Betrayal," which is in revival at the Roundabout's stunningly restored and unpoetically named new home, the American Airlines Theatre, is, on the face of it, a rather neat play—or tidy, as they would say in Pinter's native England. It begins with a scene in the present, and gradually moves back in time nine years, so that by the end of the play we know why the two people we see sitting in a pub in the first scene are having the conversation they're having. The play's three characters—Emma, a gallery owner; her husband, Robert, a publisher; and Jerry, a literary agent and Robert's best friend, who had a seven-year affair with Emma—are not people you would call mysterious, and they talk with economical clarity, in a kind of sophisticated, upper-middle-class British shorthand. And yet, though they say little (most of their lines are less than eight words long), they imply much that is untidy and unclear—how much, exactly, depends on the casting and the direction of the play. In a speech that Pinter gave at a student drama festival in 1962, he discussed the "highly ambiguous business" of language: "You and I, the characters which grow on a page, most of the time we're inexpressive, giving little away, unreliable, elusive, evasive, obstructive, unwilling. But it's out of these attributes that a language arises. A language . . . where under what is said, another thing is being said." No one would say that "Betrayal" should be performed only by British actors, but this bleak comedy of manners does demand actors who not only can speak with a believable British accent (the standards of American ears in this regard are not all that high) but who, in their marrow, understand British mannerisms and postures and rhythms, including the rhythms of those volumes-speaking British silences.

As Emma, Juliette Binoche does not come close to hitting either of these nails on the head. She is French through and through—she looks it and she sounds it—and her presence in this production, which required special permission from Actors' Equity, is nothing short of mystifying. Perhaps her being a movie star and winning an Oscar for "The English Patient" has something to do with it (the Miramax factor), and of course being beautiful (the Max Factor) probably doesn't

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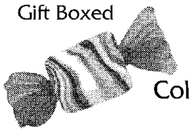
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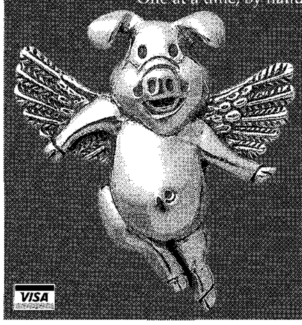

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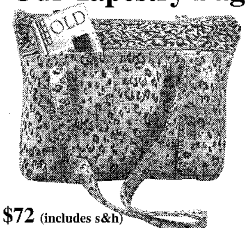

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hurt, either. But she brings no definition to Emma, no specificity. She's luscious, she's creamy—but so is melted vanilla ice cream. Patricia Hodge, in the 1982 movie version of the play, was able to give a sense of how Emma's feelings were organized—how she managed the various levels of betrayal she was engaged in. Binoche doesn't have that kind of expressiveness. She can do happy, she can do sad, but her palette doesn't include any shades of gray; under what she says, nothing else is being said—her words, and her silences, speak not volumes but leaflets. (And the hand holding the palette in the production itself, which is under the draggy direction of David Leveaux, is a little too manifestly heavy: all the costumes at the beginning are gray and black, and they become more colorful the farther back into the past we go.)

John Slattery, as Robert, and Liev Schreiber, as Jerry, do better with their parts, although Schreiber's physical presence broadcasts his Americanness at every turn. There is some crackle to their words—some sense of the stormy weather underlying them. This is particularly true of Slattery's Robert, who uses wit both to cover his own wounds and to inflict a few on others. He has lost the most, and he also has the most to hide, and Slattery excels at combining emotional nakedness with reserve to portray the terribly comic aspects of trauma—as he shows here, and as he showed even more powerfully in his unforgettable performance in Richard Greenberg's "Three Days of Rain" a few years ago. But, as good as Slattery is, all three gears need to mesh in order for this play to work; the ambiguities we're invited to ponder in "Betrayal" are supposed to arise from the play itself, not from its miscasting. ♦

CONSTABULARY NOTES FROM ALL OVER
From the (Bishop, Calif.) Inyo Register.

3 p.m. Big Pine resident advises Sheriff's office that her downstairs neighbor is still shocking her through the floor with some sort of top secret device. She says she wants it to stop. Deputy unable to locate anyone downstairs, will try to get the "stun gun" later.

8 p.m. Blind woman in West Bishop reports that someone was walking around her house while she was sleeping. Citizen asks deputy if anything is missing, deputy reports he has no way of knowing since he doesn't live there.

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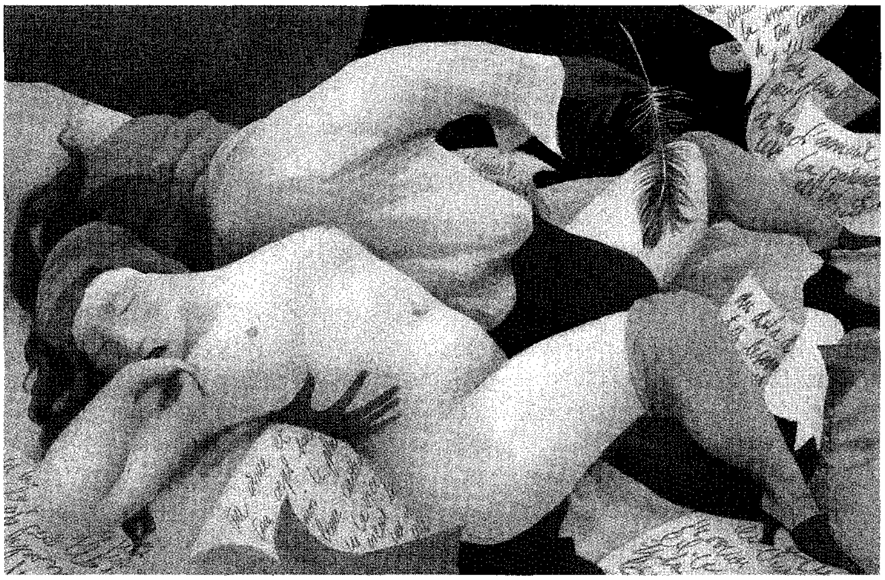
THE CURRENT CINEMA

BODY OF WRITING

Philip Kaufman's "Quills," and Ron Howard's take on Dr. Seuss.

BY ANTHONY LANE

In the new Philip Kaufman movie, "Quills," Geoffrey Rush plays the Marquis de Sade. It is the most unnatural of roles, but in Rush's case it seems only natural. Stir the helpless verbal torrent of David Helfgott, the hero of "Shine," into the calmer purpose of Walsingham, the frosty Machiavel whom Rush portrayed in "Elizabeth," and you might come up with a compound as toxic as Sade. Anyway, Rush has a high old time—higher, perhaps, than the movie deserves. He spends much of it in a single room: a furnished cell in the Charenton lunatic asylum, where the Marquis spent the final decade of his life, and where he died, in 1814. This is one of many constraints that are forced upon Rush's character: he is allowed to commit no first-degree murder and to practice the bare minimum of perversions. His most indelicate task is to rip open a roast chicken and hunt hungrily for the wishbone; Rush does it with such gusto that you can't help musing on Sade's proven expertise with other varieties of flesh.



Kate Winslet as a prison laundress and Geoffrey Rush as the Marquis de Sade.

ANA JUAN

There are a number of lesser figures, who orbit the Marquis like moons. First, we have the Abbé Coulmier (Joaquin Phoenix), a liberal young priest who runs the asylum. Then comes Dr. Royer-Collard (Michael Caine), the Abbé's nemesis; his idea of rehabilitative therapy is to strap the patient into an iron chair and dunk him in water like a tea-bag. The good doctor arrives at Charenton on a mission from Bonaparte himself, who, having listened to some of the Marquis's more succulent work, is determined to stop the flow. (France maintained this robust Napoleonic tradition until quite recently; much of the Sadean œuvre was banned until the nineteen-sixties.) No one knows how the Marquis is getting his manuscripts to the printer; the fact that one of the prison laundresses, Madeleine (Kate Winslet), is comely, corseted, and equipped with a key to Sade's cell is, of course, absolutely no reason to suspect her. Gradually, she becomes an anti-Sade; just as he infects everyone else, whether inmate or jailer, with his necrotic lusts, so she, at once chaste and pursued, causes one man after another to fall in love with her.

Kaufman, to his credit, is one of the

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few American directors who genuinely want to make movies about sex, as opposed to sexy movies—who believe that the territories of desire can be explored without going via the prurient or the prim. The odd thing is that Kaufman's journeys never work out as planned; he tends to stumble into sex when he's concentrating on something else. "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" and "The Unbearable Lightness of Being," which are supposed to be about such things as invasive disease and political power, glint brilliantly with carnal observation—with the sight of one body taking (or finding) liberties with another. Yet "Henry and June" and now "Quills," which try to meet sex head on, somehow shrink into difficult, unarousing tracts on the travails of literature.

It must be said that the spectacle of "Quills" is very beautiful, or, at any rate, strikingly foul; it is as if Kaufman had filmed it a while ago and then left it to grow a layer of creeping verdigris. Little by little, Sade is denied the writer's wherewithal. When his pen and paper are removed, he dips a bone in red wine and scribbles on the bedsheet; when the sheets and furniture are carted off, he uses a sliver of smashed mirror and the permanent ink of his own blood. This is much the strongest passage of the film; Kaufman makes nasty and delectable play with the notion of bodily fluids, not to mention that of dirty linen, and Rush has a triumphant moment when he inscribes his clothes with naughty narrative and stands proud as the last word in style. (If nothing else, this could start a fashion; keep an eye on the spring catwalks for text-heavy suits.) It all ends muckily in a pit, with the Marquis reduced to a bare, forked animal and his prose daubed in excrement on the walls; I take it that we are supposed to remember the "dirty protests," staged with equal stench, by I.R.A. diehards in Northern Ireland's Maze Prison in 1978. If so, Kaufman's portrait of Sade the freedom fighter is complete.

It is also, if you happen to care about such distinctions, baloney. The Marquis died quietly and without radical gestures. The blasphemous rants that Rush spits out with such panache are, understandably, more thrilling than the polite, almost crawling poem that the real Marquis composed in honor of a visiting cardinal. And, while the incarcerated Sade did indeed write plays that were performed at Charenton and attended by a fashionable audience, the theatricals in question were not the phallocratic roustabouts devised by Kaufman and his screenwriter, Doug Wright, but "conventional, Marivaux-type society dramas." That is the verdict of Francine du Plessix Gray, whose account of the Marquis and his long-suffering wife was published last year. Best of all, the Abbé Coulmier was a bulbous, hunchbacked dwarf, who stood, or stooped, a touch over four feet. And whom do we have representing this unfortunate creature? Joaquin Phoenix.

I am all for treating truth to a little foreplay; the problem with "Quills" is not its inaccuracy but that it is inaccurate in a dull cause. Maybe because Wright based the script on his own play, the movie feels stagy and starched—not a mood that suits either Sade, whose open, libertarian credentials the film is so eager to affirm, or the flexible Kaufman, who, as he showed in "The Right Stuff," likes nothing better than to switch tone and scale, from the intimate to infinity and beyond. Kate Winslet can warm up any picture, but her role here is laced as tightly as her bust, and there is not much that even she can do to dispel the stale air of period performance that hangs over the entire project. It is one of those movies in which every street is automatically turned into street theatre, with a throng of incensed citizens being required to drool, snarl, bay for blood, hawk undesirable wares with vowel-only cries, and so forth. Worse still, the Charenton scenes present us with that dismaying subspecies: the period idiot. Nevertheless, if you can stomach this stuff, plus the dose of tongue-slicing toward the end, "Quills" should be seen, simply for the presence of Geoffrey Rush. Of all

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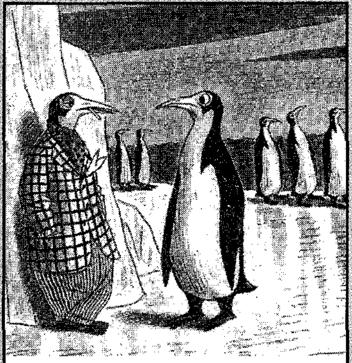
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the lies perpetrated by the film, his alone will win you over; in place of the Marquis de Sade, perhaps the most wearisome of revolutionary writers, we have a charming combination of scoundrel, flirt, dandy, nudist, and wit.

It takes a bold director to wrestle Dr. Seuss onto a movie screen. It may be the rush and rattle of those machine-gun rhymes, with their far-off echo of Gilbert and Sullivan, or it may be Seuss's stubbornly shut-in world, open to none but his freakish, unflagging anthropomorphs, with their curved and jointless limbs; even the Cat in the Hat, all swan neck and drunkard's frozen grin, looks more like a passing stooge in a Preston Sturges comedy than anything you would feed on milk and mice. Whatever, these are thoroughly bookish books, made for the classroom or the nighttime recitation; what could Hollywood possibly make of them?

The answer is: a mess. Ron Howard's "The Grinch," an adaptation of "How the Grinch Stole Christmas," wanders around in search of Seussian strangeness and winds up, uncomfortably, straddling the vulgar and the cute. The vulgar comes courtesy of Jim Carrey, who looks doubly annoyed in the title role; first, because that is a Grinchy thing to be, and, second, because his character wears so much puke-green makeup that Carrey is hard put to practice the full range of facial calisthenics that his fans demand. The cute is pretty much everything else; the screen is stuffed to bulging with chipmunky humanoids called Whos, one of whom, the petite Cindy Lou Who (Taylor Momsen), trills an emetic ditty entitled "Christmas, Why Can't I Find You?" Because Christmas is blocking its ears and hiding behind the tree, that's why. The lesson of the film, in case you're wondering, is that the festive season, just like Universal Pictures, has nothing to do with money and gifts. "The Grinch" isn't charming, or quizzical, or usefully scary, like a Tim Burton flick; in fact, the one thing I like about it is the news that it has been chosen for this year's Royal Film Performance, in London. As choices go, this feels superfluous: why would Her Majesty the Queen want to sit through the tale of a grumbling, grim-jawed sourpuss when she's been married to one for the past fifty-three years? ♦

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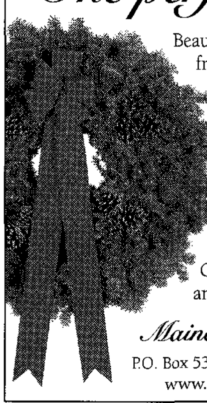
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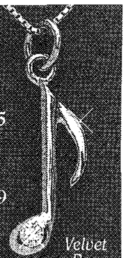
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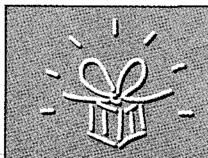
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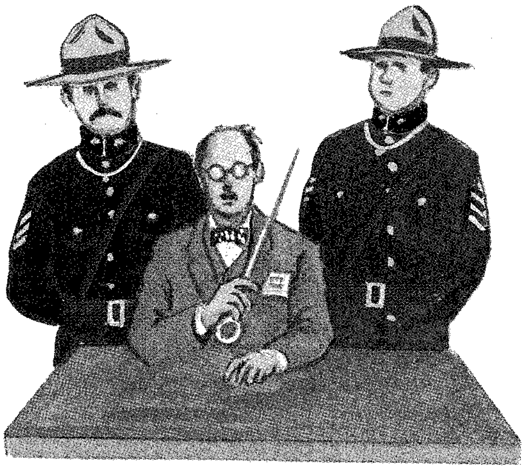
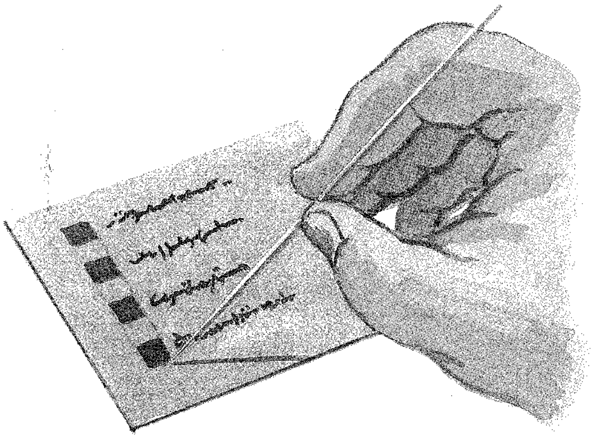
THE BACK PAGE BY BRUCE McCALL

FOUR CHADS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD

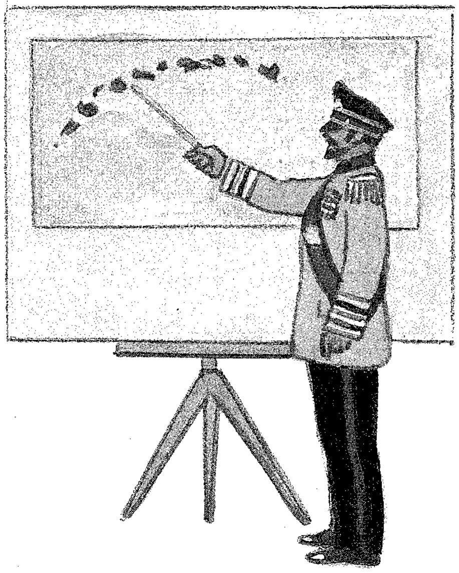
1927: Saskatchewan officials supervising the province's parliamentary election reject 1,298 ballots bearing telltale "pyramid chads"—a sure sign that icepicks were used to punch the holes. Icepicks, classified as lethal weapons under Saskatchewan law, are barred from voting booths.

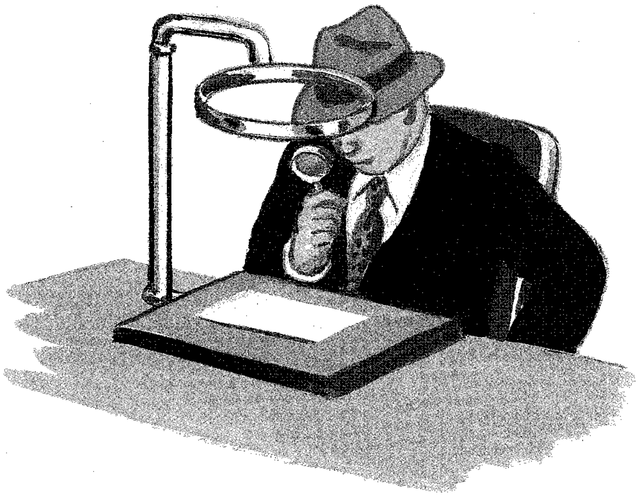




1940: Riled by the prospect of cheap competition, the Bulgarian confetti lobby manages to ram through legislation invalidating any local, regional, or national voting ballot with one or more chads of any size or shape. Charges of vote fraud fly after the ruling Royalist Loyalist Party sweeps to victory, six hundred thousand and five votes to one; accusations that confetti-lobby goons provided pro-Party voters with ultra-fine needles to insure chad-free ballot holes have never been substantiated.

1947: Impoverished voters in even more impoverished Taxistan have no pens or pencils for punching ballots in the fledgling nation's first democratic elections, so they use their teeth to gnaw holes indicating their candidate selection. Wielding huge photographic blowups of the distinctively ragged chad thus produced, and charging that this constitutes mastication—violating an obscure sanitation ordinance barring the unauthorized chewing of official documents—strongman bullyboy and President-for-Life General Swarmwamarama declares the election invalid.





1948: Mercury County, New Mexico, officials call in the F.B.I. after they find that not a single ballot cast for any candidate in the race for sheriff bears any trace of chad. Six months later, after exhaustive investigation and microanalysis, the F.B.I. confesses itself stumped. The mystery has never been solved. Mercury County, New Mexico, is twenty-six miles from the town of Roswell.

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